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METHODISM

EXPLAINED AND DEFENDED.

BY

J. S. INSKIP.

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TO THE

Ministers and Members

OF THE

METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH,

THIS WORK

Is Respectfully Inscribed,

BY THE AUTHOR.

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INTRODUCTION.

THAT particular form of christianity, denominated Methodism, has passed through one century of its existence; and though volumes upon volumes have been written in its exposition and defense, yet the ever-varying phases of attack from foes without and foes within, like the protean forms of infidelity itself, must again be met, and the objections which have been reiterated against the doctrines and polity of the church, though answered a thousand times, must again and again be vanquished.

As a creature of Providence, Methodism, in her peculiar external organization, has adapted herself to the exigencies of the times, the genius of the various countries where she has been carried, and the progressive movements of the generations through which she has passed; and hence, though constantly changing, yet, like the modifications through which the human system passes in the various stages of its development, she has always maintained her identity entire. She has the same head, and heart, and hand, and the same calm, benignant eye she possessed, as when, from the hand of Providence, she was sent forth

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into the world to fulfill her high and holy mission. Every thing connected with the almost inimitable Wesley, possesses an interest and charm peculiarly attractive to all his followers. The rude simplicity of the worship connected with the early planting of Methodism, when its first heralds preached the gospel in the fields, and woods, and highways, and in the cemeteries, collieries, and mines; and the organization of the society in the huge and dingy Foundery, where the king's cannon had been cast,—will ever be invested with an interest to all who love vital godliness and make the form subordinate to the power.

The plain, unstudied nature of the sermons, richly laden with gospel truth, and the untiring zeal of those early preachers, who, in the language of Borrow, in his Lavengro, "animated by the spirit of Christ, amidst much poverty, and, alas! much contempt, persisted in carrying the light of the gospel amidst the dark parishes of what, but for their instrumentality, would scarcely be christian England," will ever elicit the admiration of the church and the world. While church-fed, literary scavengers, and white-cravated, rosy-cheeked priests denounced them as a host of "consecrated cobblers, canting hypocrites, and raving enthusiasts," the down-trodden poor hailed them as their benefactors. In the days of Wesley, the rich only were cared for, while the poor were generally lost sight of, and an impassable gulf forever separated them

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from their wealthy neighbors. A monarchy always produces a *caste* in society; and the "high born" and "well-bred," no matter what their character, talents, or morals, are always regarded as a superior race of beings; while the untitled poor, mauger all their qualifications or worth, are unnoticed and unknown. In a republican government like our own, where there is no aristocracy of birth or wealth, but where the true basis of excellence and character is worth and talents, there are no poor, in the above sense of that word. Here, all fictitious distinctions are unknown; and liberty without licentiousness—equality without amalgamation—and fraternity on the true principle of elective affinity, exist in their true character.

Methodism in England, in its rise, and during all the eventful periods of its progress, always did, and always will find it necessary, so long as the distinctions created by the British government exist, in carrying out the principles of christianity, to preach the gospel to the poor. This simple fact, namely, the law-enacted grades of society, in connexion with the state of religion and morals in the church in Wesley's day, will serve to show the necessity which existed for Methodism, under Providence, assuming the distinctive forms which have characterized it as a religious body.

The Methodist church in this country has assumed a type peculiar to our institutions in fact, if not in form. As the offshoot of Wesleyanism, it has taken root and

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sprung up in a different soil and climate, and partakes largely of their fostering and genial nature. In this land we have no gospel for the poor or the rich, the high or the low, the bond or the free, as specific classes; but, in the language of the commission of its great Author, our gospel is for "*every creature.*" One who has recently been writing elaborate articles on the "great fundamental, constitutional peculiarities in the organic structure of the Methodist Episcopal Church," says, "no policy whatever must be adopted for the purpose of drawing the rich into our fold; their condition," he adds, "is too sad, and their salvation too impossible," to justify any outlay of effort on the part of the church for their salvation. If this is not being wise above what is written, and a species of religious charlatanry unsufferable in one who claims to be a preacher of the gospel, then have we grossly mistaken the genius of christianity. "But," says this writer, "the common people flocked to Mr. Wesley and heard him gladly; while the wise after the flesh, the mighty and the noble, did not come." Wonder if Mr. Wesley would have said to his beloved king, who was the subject of his last prayer, and the dignitaries of church and state, if they had come seeking admission into his societies, "we can't take you in; our gospel is not for you, but for miners, colliers, workingmen and servants; we can't take you in, as our mission does not extend to any but the poor, the weak-minded, and the degraded?"

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The presumption is, that he would not have turned any of the nobility away if they had sought admission into his classes. The fact, that few of the higher classes joined Mr. Wesley's societies, certainly should not be urged as a reason that the mission of Methodism was designed for none other than the poor. Such an assumption is ridiculous, and such teaching in this country is directly calculated to create a *caste* as hateful in itself as it is odious to God; while its direct tendency is to array the poor against the rich, and those in authority, by creating a restless, suspicious, and unhappy disposition in the hearts of those who are not providentially blest with what others enjoy. Obvious as is its tendency, we cannot but believe that the course of such as teach this cant is founded in ignorance of its consequences.

The following pages cover nearly the whole field of controversy in regard to the polity of the Methodist Church, and present a clear and candid exposition of Methodism in a systematic form and a highly argumentative style. It is a book for the times, and should be read by all who desire to become more intimately acquainted with Methodist economy. It excels all other works of its class in the arrangement and judicious treatment of its subjects. S.

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METHODISM

EXPLAINED AND DEFENDED.

CHAPTER I.

HINTS TO THE READER.

Reasons of the author for appearing before the public—His views frankly avowed—Authorities consulted—No pretensions to literary merit—Design of the work.

In this age of bookmaking, special and important reasons for asking public attention, are presented to the mind of almost every author. However extensive the publications that have issued from the press, every man who writes a book, discovers some particular emergency, to meet which, he deems his work suitable and necessary. The productions of others he readily admits are meritorious, and contain much that is useful and true. Yet, should all his thoughts have been previously published, the book containing them is too large and expensive—the style is too grave or too gay—or because of some peculiar and uncontrollable circumstances, it has failed to reach that portion of

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community, for whose instruction and welfare, he is prompted to write.

How far the author of the following pages may have been influenced by the generous sentiment last mentioned, he submits to the judgment of the candid reader. Still, he will be frank enough to say, the subjects upon which he writes have been ably discussed; and some of them, well nigh exhausted. The church of which he is an unworthy member, has never been at a loss for eminent and well-skilled defenders. These have clearly demonstrated her doctrines and discipline to be in harmony with the oracles of God, and wisely adapted to the moral exigencies of the world. Nevertheless, it has come into his mind "to write a book." He, also, "would show his opinion." Whether or not, in so doing, any new view will be presented, or any additional light be furnished to those who may take time to read what he has written, is in some measure problematical. Presuming the reader may have had access to such works as "Watson's Life of Wesley" — "Bangs' History of the Methodist Episcopal Church" — "Stevens' Church Polity" — "Hodgson's Defense of the Polity of Methodism" — "Dixon on Methodism" — Strickland on the "Genius and Mission of Methodism," and other similar works; in the book he is now invited to read, he may find much that will appear but a repetition of what he has already seen.

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The views of the author, which, on all the subjects introduced into the work, are frankly presented, he desires to be understood, are both original and honest. However strange, radical, or heretical they may seem to others, to his own mind they are scriptural, truly methodistic, and susceptible of the clearest proof. And hence he will earnestly contend for them, whenever called upon so to do, either before his brethren or the world.

In some parts of the work, especially in the chapters upon "Discipline" — "Episcopacy" — "Presiding Elders," and the "Laity," there may be positions assumed, which, at first view, will startle and offend those who are continually adverting to what they call "*old-fashioned Methodism.*" But even the most ultra of these, it is hoped, will give the author an impartial hearing before they condemn him. Justice demands this much at their hands, and charity may induce them to pause a moment ere they proceed to his condemnation and execution for the crime of heresy.

The cause of truth can suffer nothing by being contrasted with error. And if the following pages contain any serious error, it can easily be pointed out by those who are "set for the defense of the truth." The opinions of our economy here advanced, are held by a large number of the ministers and members of our church. And if they be false and unsound, and

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satisfactory proof be adduced of this, the author will congratulate himself with the reflection, that he has thus indirectly afforded an opportunity to correct his brethren and himself "from the error of their way." In any event, therefore, it is believed good will be accomplished. Doubtless, this will be the result, if the discussion be conducted in a proper spirit—such a spirit as becomes men "professing godliness," and the character of the subject under consideration. The interests involved, are of too grave import and magnitude, to admit of a mere *strife for the mastery*. No witty tricks, or crafty policy, should be tolerated in the investigation of such a topic. The work before the reader, claims to be free from every thing of the sort. The justice of this claim he must decide.

As it would encumber and deface the work, to *name* the authorities, and to give chapter, page, etc., in every instance where they have been consulted or quoted, it is deemed sufficient to say here, that the works mentioned in a former page, have afforded the author much valuable aid in the preparation of his work. Where any quotation has been made at length, it will be found designated by the usual marks. It may be added, also, that many of the points discussed by the author, are not settled by scriptural authority. In such cases, of course, no appeal is made thereto—except in support of the general principles involved. Those questions, met by the plain sanctions of holy

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writ, will be found fortified with quotations, as explicit and lengthy, as circumstances and the general design of the work, would permit.

With these observations, "Methodism Explained and Defended," is sent out into the world, not claiming any literary merit, but soliciting a candid and patient perusal. If the reader will do the author the justice to examine without prejudice, the sentiments he has advanced, and the arguments by which they are sustained, he is persuaded, he will be accredited with an honest purpose to know and teach the truth. The cautions and warnings occasionally given, are not designed to create alarm or distrust, but to direct attention to evils, which, if arrested in their incipient stage, can easily be remedied; but, if permitted to increase, they may ultimately become unmanageable and disastrous in the extreme.

It is also hoped there may be some facts and suggestions, interspersed through the work, which will relieve many of the groundless fears concerning the condition and the prospects of Methodism, excited by bigoted and contracted views of its spirit and economy. Beyond this, the fate awaiting his effort, or the judgment that may be rendered concerning it, is of as little moment to himself as to any one else.

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CHAPTER II.

JOHN WESLEY.

Birth—Parentage—Fills the curacy of his father—Voyage and mission to America—In some respects a failure—Designs of Providence concealed—Intercourse with Moravians—Returns to England—Communicates with Peter Bohler—Conversion—Preaches with great zeal—Success of his ministry—Death—Description of the closing scene—Personal appearance—Character—Labors—In advance of the age in which he lived—Views upon temperance—Slavery, etc.

BEFORE entering upon the merits of the discussion suggested in the title-page, the reader is requested to pause a moment, to contemplate the life and character of the founder of Methodism, JOHN WESLEY. This eminent man, was born at Epworth, England, June 17, A. D. 1703. The parents of Mr. Wesley were noted for the careful attention which they gave to the moral and intellectual improvement of their children.

Mrs. Wesley was led to interest herself more particularly with her son John, because of his remarkable providential deliverance from death, at a time when the parsonage at Epworth was consumed by fire. She considered herself under special obligations to be unusually careful for the soul of one "whom God had thus so mercifully provided for." The effect of this

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conviction of duty, was highly propitious to the character and success of her son through his entire life.

After completing his education, and acquiring some celebrity at Oxford, he entered upon the active duties of the ministry, and labored for a short time as his father's curate. He was ordained deacon in the year 1725, and received priest's orders about three years afterward. In the year 1736, Mr. Wesley, in company with his brother Charles, sailed for America, on a mission to the colony of Georgia. The design of this mission was two-fold: First, to supply the spiritual wants of the colonists; and, secondly, to secure the conversion of the Indians living in their vicinity.

The success of this enterprise was not of much moment. For various reasons not necessary to mention, but little was accomplished by the labors of the Wesleys while in America. Nevertheless, as is frequently the case, the ultimate designs of Providence, in this apparently fruitless mission, were concealed. In the midst of great privations and persecutions, an end was secured, which was not seen or known, until the development of subsequent events. On the passage to Georgia, Mr. Wesley became acquainted with a company of Moravians. By frequent intercourse with these humble and devout followers of our Redeemer, he obtained much light upon the subject of experimental religion. Having labored some time among the colonists, with considerable perplexity and

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discouragement, he returned to England, and under the wise and faithful teaching of Peter Bohler, was led to apprehend the truth as it is in Jesus. After earnestly struggling to obtain the blessing of God, he was enabled to "lay hold of the hope set before him," and rejoiced in the knowledge of salvation by the remission of sin.

He immediately commenced, with great zeal and success, to preach to the people, and exhorted them to seek salvation by grace, through faith. His doctrine, and manner of life, produced a great sensation wherever he went. Multitudes, prompted by curiosity, or a desire to have a "more perfect knowledge of the way of truth," came to hear him. They were astonished and mocked, or awakened and converted. In this manner, his labors were abundantly sanctioned of heaven. The seals of his ministry soon amounted to thousands. The formalist, libertine, philosopher, and infidel, were moved and excited to wonder and scorning, or repentance and reformation. Indeed, the whole valley of bones, gave signs of returning life. It seemed the time had come, predicted by the prophet, in which a "nation would be born at once." He continued in the work of the ministry, sixty-five years; and closed his eventful labors, March 2, 1791, in the eighty-eighth year of his age. His end was peaceful and triumphant. He left a name and memory, that will continue, until time shall be no more. Of no one

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else could it be said with greater propriety, "he being dead, yet speaketh."

The closing scene has been thus described: "Having placed him in his chair, his friends perceived him change for death. But, regardless of his dying body, he said, with a weak voice, 'Lord thou givest strength to those that speak, and to those who cannot. Speak, Lord, to all our hearts, and let them know that thou loosest tongues.' He then sung

'To Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
Who sweetly all agree,———'

Here his voice failed. After gasping for breath, he said, 'now we have done all.' He was then laid in the bed, from which he rose no more. Having obtained a little rest, he called upon those present to pray and praise. They all bowed at the throne of grace, and the room was filled with the presence and glory of God. He then said, 'let me be buried in nothing but what is woolen, and let my corpse be carried into the chapel.' Then, as if he had done with all below, and was ready to 'depart and be with Christ,' he again requested those around, would 'pray and praise.' Several friends who were in the house, being called up, they all knelt for prayer. His fervor of spirit was manifest to every one present. In particular parts of the prayer, his whole soul seemed to be engaged in a manner, which evidently showed how ardently he desired the full accomplishment of all

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their hopes. As one of them was praying in a very earnest manner, that if God were about to take away their *father*, to his eternal rest, he would be pleased to continue and increase his blessing upon the doctrine and discipline, which he had long made his servant the means of propagating and establishing in the world, he responded with unusual fervor, 'AMEN!' They arose from their knees, and taking each one by the hand, he said 'farewell—farewell!'"

Shortly after this, he strove to speak, but could not. Discovering they did not understand him, he paused a little, and with all his remaining strength, cried out, "THE BEST OF ALL IS, GOD IS WITH US." And again, as he lifted his arm in token of victory, he repeated, "the best of all is, God is with us." As his brother's widow came to his bedside, he exclaimed, "He giveth his servants rest." His lips being moistened, he said, "we thank thee, O Lord, for these, and all thy mercies. Bless the church and the king; and grant us truth and peace, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, for ever and ever." Afterward, he said, "He causeth his servants to lie down in peace." Then pausing a little, he said, "the clouds drop fatness;" and, "the Lord is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge." During the night, he often attempted to repeat the psalm just mentioned, but he could only utter, "I'll praise, I'll praise." The next morning a friend called and prayed with him. And, as the mournful group present, knelt

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around his bed, with heaven full in view, he feebly articulated the word, *"farewell!"* and ceased "at once to work and live." Thus ended the life of one of the greatest and best of men, who have lived in any age of the world. After the most brilliant and successful career, ever performed by a mere man, in full hope of the resurrection of the just, he departed to his rest. He disappeared from our world

> "As the morning star,
> Which goes not down behind the darkened west,
> Nor hides obscured among the tempests of the sky,
> But melts away into the light of heaven."

The personal appearance of Mr. Wesley, is said to have been remarkable. "His stature was low; his habit of body, in every period of life, the reverse of corpulent; and expressive of strict temperance and continual exercise. Notwithstanding his small size, his step was firm, and his appearance, until within a few years of his death, vigorous and muscular. He had a clear, smooth forehead; an aquiline nose; an eye the brightest and most piercing that can be conceived; and a freshness of complexion scarcely ever found in one of his age. His dress was a pattern of neatness and simplicity."

One, in describing him as a preacher, says: "His attitude in the pulpit, was graceful and easy; his action, calm and natural, yet pleasing and expressive; his voice, not loud, but clear and manly; his style,

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neat, simple, and perspicuous; and admirably adapted to the capacity of his hearers. His discourses, in point of composition, were extremely different on different occasions. When he gave himself sufficient time for preparation, he succeeded; but when he did not, he failed. It was manifest to his friends, for many years before he died, that his employments were too numerous, and that he preached too often, to appear with the same advantage at all times in the pulpit. His sermons were always short. He was seldom more than half an hour in delivering a discourse; sometimes not so long. His subjects were judiciously chosen; instructive, and interesting to the audience; and well adapted to gain attention and warm the heart."

An anonymous writer, spoke of him shortly after his decease, in the following language: "Now, that John Wesley has finished his course upon earth, I may be allowed to estimate his character, and the loss the world has sustained by his death. His natural and acquired abilities, were both of the highest rank. His apprehension was lively and distinct; his learning extensive; his judgment, though not infallible, was in most cases, excellent. His mind was steadfast and resolved. His elocution was ready and clear—graceful and easy—accurate and unaffected. As a writer, his style, though unstudied, and flowing with natural ease, yet for accuracy and perspicuity, was such as may vie with the best writers of the English language.

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Though his temper was warm, his manners were gentle, simple, and uniform. Never were such happy talents better seconded by an unrelenting perseverance in those courses, which his singular endowments, and his zealous love to the interests of mankind, marked out for him. His constitution was excellent; and never was a constitution less abused, less spared, or more excellently applied, in an exact subservience to the faculties of his mind. His labors and studies were wonderful. The latter were not confined to theology, but extended to every subject that tended to the improvement, or rational entertainment of the mind. If we consider his reading, by itself, his writings and other labors, by themselves, any one of them will appear sufficient to have kept a person of ordinary application busy during his whole life."

For fifty years together, beside writing and reviewing a large number of voluminous works, he preached annually about eight hundred sermons, and traveled, chiefly on horseback, four thousand, five hundred miles; making the entire number of sermons he preached, *forty thousand*, and the distance traveled, *two hundred and twenty thousand miles*. The reasons why he was able to perform such an unusual amount of labor, may be gathered from the following reflections, made upon entering his eighty-fifth year.

"I this day enter on my eighty-fifth year. And what cause have I to praise God, as for a thousand

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spiritual blessings, so for bodily blessings also! How little have I suffered yet, by 'the rush of numerous years!' It is true, I am not so agile as I was in times past: I do not run or walk so fast as I did. My sight is a little decayed. My left eye has grown dim, and hardly serves me to read. I have daily some pain in the ball of my right eye, as also in my right temple, (occasioned by a blow received some time since,) and in my right shoulder and arm, which I impute partly to a sprain, and partly to the rheumatism. I find, likewise, some decay in my memory, with regard to names and things lately past: but not at all with regard to what I have read or heard, twenty, forty, or sixty years ago. Neither do I find any decay in my hearing, smell, taste, or appetite, (though I want but a third part of the food I once did;) nor do I feel any such thing as weariness, either in traveling or preaching. And I am not conscious of any decay in writing sermons, which I do as readily, and I believe as correctly, as ever.

To what cause can I impute this, that I am as I am? First, doubtless, to the power of God, fitting me for the work to which I am called, as long as he pleases to continue me therein: and next, subordinately to this, to the prayers of his children. May we not impute it, as inferior means: 1. To my constant exercise and change of air? 2. To my never having lost a night's sleep, sick or well, at land or sea, since

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I was born? 3. To my having sleep at command, so that whenever I feel myself almost worn out, I call it, and it comes, day or night? 4. To my having constantly, for above sixty years, risen at four in the morning? 5. To my constant preaching at five in the morning, for above fifty years? 6. To my having had so little pain in my life, and so little sorrow and anxious care? Even now, though I find pain daily in my eye, temple, or arm, yet it is never violent, and seldom lasts many minutes at a time.

Whether or not this is sent to give me warning that I am shortly to quit this tabernacle, I do not know: but, be it one way or the other, I have only to say,—

'My remnant of days
I spend to His praise,
Who died the whole world to redeem:
Be they many or few,
My days are His due
And they all are devoted to Him!'"

And, referring to some persons in the nation who thought themselves endowed with the gift of prophecy, he adds, "If this is to be the last year of my life, according to some of these prophets, I hope it will be the best. I am not careful about it, but heartily receive the advice of the angel in Milton,—

'How well is thine; how long permit to heaven.'"

On all the most important topics, of which he wrote

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or spoke, he was far in advance of the age in which he lived. His principles and language upon the traffic in ardent spirits, in the judgment of one of the most enthusiastic reformers of the present day, merit for his name and memory, a statue of gold, to be furnished by the human race.

On the subject just mentioned, the following passage occurs in his sermon on the "use of money." "Neither may we gain by hurting our neighbor in his body. Therefore, we may not sell anything which tends to impair health. Such is, eminently, all that liquid fire, commonly called drams, or spirituous liquors. It is true, these may have a place in medicine; they may be of use in some bodily disorders; although there would rarely be occasion for them, were it not for the unskillfulness of the practitioner. Therefore, such as prepare and sell them only for this end, may keep their conscience clear. But who are they? Who prepare them only for this end? Do you know ten such distillers in England? Then excuse these. But all who sell them in the common way, are poisoners general. They murder his Majesty's subjects by wholesale. Neither does their eye pity or spare. They drive them to hell like sheep. And what is their gain? Is it not the blood of these men? Who then would envy their large estates and sumptuous palaces? A curse is in the midst of them. The curse of God cleaves to the stones, the timber, the furniture of

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them. The curse of God is in their gardens—their walks—their groves; a fire that burns to the nethermost hell. *Blood, blood is there: the foundation—the floor—the walls—the roof—are stained with blood.*

And canst thou hope, oh, thou man of blood! though thou art 'clothed in scarlet and fine linen, and farest sumptuously every day;' canst thou hope to deliver down thy fields of blood to the third generation? Not so; for there is a God in heaven: therefore, thy name shall soon be rooted out. Like as those whom thou hast destroyed, body and soul, 'thy memorial shall perish with thee.'"

In a tract, entitled "A Word to the Drunkard," he uses the following pointed language: "Are you a man? God made you a man; but you have made yourself a beast. Wherein does a man differ from a beast? Is it not chiefly in reason and understanding? You strip yourself of understanding. You do all you can to make yourself a mere beast; not a fool—not a madman only, but a swine—a poor, filthy swine. Go and wallow with them in the mire. Go, drink on, till thy nakedness be uncovered, and shameful spewing be on thy glory.

Oh, how honorable is a beast of God's making, compared to one who makes himself a beast! But that is not all. You make yourself a devil. You stir up all the devilish tempers that are in you, and gain others which were not in you; at least you highten and

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increase them. You cause the fire of anger, or malice, or lust, to burn seven times hotter than before. At the same time, you grieve the Spirit of God, till you drive him quite away from you; and whatever spark of good remained in your soul, you drown and quench at once."

On all questions involving practical religion and pure morality, he used great plainness of speech. No consideration could induce him to avoid a frank and pointed declaration of "the whole counsel of God." National sins attracted his attention, and received a just and withering rebuke in his pulpit ministrations, and from his pen. Iniquity, when exalted to the place of power, and strengthened by general custom, was exposed and denounced. In one of his sermons in which he spoke of the sins of his countrymen, he used the following language:

"Where is mercy to be found, if it would stand in opposition to interest? How few will scruple, for a valuable consideration, to oppress the widow or fatherless? And where shall we find truth? Deceit and fraud go not out of our streets. Who is it that speaks truth from his heart? Whose words are the picture of his thoughts? Where is he that has 'put away all lying,' that never speaks what he does not mean? Who is ashamed of this? Indeed it was once said, and even by a statesman, 'All other vices have had their patrons; but lying is so base, so abominable a vice, that never was any one found yet, who dared

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openly to plead for it.' Would one imagine this writer lived in a court? Yea, and that in the present century? Did not he himself, then, as well as all his brother statesmen, plead for a trade of deliberate lying? Did he not plead for the innocence, yea, and the necessity, of employing *spies?* The vilest race of liars under the sun? Yet who ever scrupled using them, but lord Clarenden? Is there a character more despicable than even that of a liar? Perhaps there is: even that of an epicure."

The Sabbath school institution, and the tract cause, received his attention, and were liberally supported by all the means he could command. He was free from all selfishness and bigotry. In the midst of the most uncharitable persecutions and abuse, heaped upon him by those calling themselves christians, and at a period noted for the violence of sectarian prejudice; from Scarborough, he wrote a letter to some forty or fifty clergymen, containing the very principles of the Evangelical Alliance. And all the circumstances taken into the account, it may, without vanity, or exaggeration be said, he has had few equals, and no superiors. "The world may ne'er look on his like again." Such was the life and character of the founder of that system it is proposed now to examine and defend.

Before closing this chapter, it will be in place to say, that, notwithstanding the respect entertained for Mr. Wesley, by his followers, they by no means regard him

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as infallible. To his views of religious doctrine, and church government, very justly, great deference is paid. But they are not considered authoritative, farther than they may be in accordance with the rule of faith and practice given us in the oracles of God.

Nor was he without enemies. Various insinuations have been made concerning his ambition, love of power, etc., etc. The unfortunate state of his domestic affairs, has, in some instances, been dwelt upon with malevolent interest. But, after all that his adversaries have done to impair his influence, and arrest the progress of the system he established, the world is full of the most satisfactory assurances, that his name will never perish, but be in "everlasting remembrance."

"Thus fares the man whom virtue, beacon-like,
Hath fixed upon the hills of eminence;
At him the tempests of mad envy strike,
And rage against his piles of innocence;
But still the more they wrong him, and the more
They seek to keep his worth from being known,
They daily make it greater than before,
And cause his fame the further to be blown."

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CHAPTER III.

METHODISM.

Origin of the term—Charles Wesley designated a Methodist first—Used formerly in connection with a body of physicians, also a sect of religionists—Import of the term—Wesley's definition—Refers chiefly to the heart—Catholic spirit—Attention since given to form and usage—Instrumentalities of Methodism modified—No fellowship with bigotry.

The term *Methodist*, was applied in derision, to the Wesleys, and others, connected with the "Holy Club," at Oxford. Mr. Charles Wesley, however, seems to have received this appellation before his brother John. The natural disposition of Charles, is said to have been unusually cheerful and sprightly. Hence, he was not so ready to heed the exhortations urged upon him, to adopt a strictly religious course of life. Still he was unblamable in conduct, and pursued his studies with the greatest diligence. To John, upon his return from the curacy of his father, he stated, that he had lost his first year at college, in diversions; the next, he set himself to study; diligence led him into serious thinking; he went to the weekly sacraments, persuading two or three students to accompany him; he observed the method of study prescribed by the statutes of the university; and this *gained him the harmless name of*

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Methodist. The term, however, was in use a long time prior to this. It was given to an ancient sect of physicians; and, also, to a certain class of religionists, whose chief peculiarity consisted in their preference for plain preaching, and simplicity of dress and manners. The followers of Wesley, soon became known every where by this title. Having adverted to the peculiar character and temperament of Mr. CHARLES WESLEY, the reader will excuse the rather abrupt introduction of the following extract from a letter of Miss Wesley, his daughter, written for the purpose of explaining a remark concerning her father, by Mr. Moore.

"Mr. Moore seems to think that my father preferred *rest to going about to do good.* He had a rising family, and considered it his duty to confine his labors to Bristol and London, where he labored most seduously in ministerial offices; and judged that it was incumbent upon him to watch over the youth of his sons, especially in a profession which nature so strongly pointed out, but which was peculiarly dangerous. He always said his brother was formed to lead, and he to follow. No one ever more rejoiced in another's superiority, or was more willing to confess it. Mr. Moore's statement of his absence of mind in his younger days, was probably correct, as he was born impetuous, and ardent, and sincere. But what a change must have taken place when we were born! For his exactness in his accounts, in his manuscripts, in his bureau, etc., equalled my

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uncle's. Not in his dress, indeed; for my mother said, if she did not watch over him, he might have put on an old for a new coat, and marched out. Such was his power of abstraction, that he could read and compose, with his children in the room, and visiters talking around him. He was near forty when he married, and had eight children, of whom we were the youngest. So kind and amiable a character in domestic life can scarcely be imagined. The tenderness he showed in every weakness, and the sympathy in every pain, would fill sheets to describe. But, I am not writing his eulogy; only I must add, with so warm a temper, he never was heard to speak an angry word to a servant, or known to strike a child in anger,—and he knew no guile!"

But what is a Methodist—or what is *Methodism?* Mr. Wesley, in a dictionary published by him in the year 1753, defines the word Methodist to mean, "one that lives according to the *method laid down in the bible.* In describing Methodism, he says: it is "the old religion—*the religion of the bible*—the religion of the primitive church—the religion of the Church of England—the love of God and all mankind." He also understood Methodism to be in some respects *peculiar.* The peculiarity thereof, is thus described in his own language: "One circumstance more is quite peculiar to the people called Methodists; that is, *the terms* upon which any person may be admitted into their society.

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They do not impose, in order to their admission, any opinions whatever. Let them hold a particular or general redemption — absolute, or conditional decrees; let them be Churchmen or Dissenters; Presbyterians or Independents, it is no obstacle. Let them choose one mode of baptism or another, it is no bar to their admission. The Presbyterian may be a *Presbyterian still;* the Independent or Anabaptist *use his own mode of worship.* So may the Quaker; and none will contend with him about it. They think and let think. One condition, and one only, is required — a real desire to save their souls. Where this is, it is enough: *they desire no more;* THEY LAY STRESS UPON NOTHING ELSE. They ask only — is thy heart herein, as my heart? If it be, give me thy hand." This is *old-fashioned* Methodism — as understood and explained by Mr. Wesley himself.

From the foregoing considerations, it appears, the system of Methodism originally had reference chiefly to the *heart,* and not to mere opinions or external circumstances. It directed God should be worshipped; but the precise mode in which this worship should be performed, was left to be determined by the conscience and preferences of the individual, and the necessities and indications of circumstances around him. He might use established and antiquated forms, or decline to do so; be a Quaker or a Presbyterian; he might hold any opinions, and adopt any method of worship

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he preferred, and yet be a true and consistent Methodist, provided his heart was filled with love to God and man.

These catholic and enlarged sentiments and views, directed the mind and heart of John Wesley, in laying the foundation of the system now under consideration. It will be well if we do not lose sight of these great, first principles, in our deference, to the merely circumstantial or incidental features of our economy. These are the "ancient landmarks" — "the ways of the fathers." And from them we should never be estranged.

Since, however, the important change which took place at the time of the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the relation that existed between Methodism in England and America, of which we shall speak at length in a subsequent chapter, we have been compelled to give more or less heed "to forms and usage." Still, our chief concern, should be with the fundamental features of the system. So far as any others are concerned, we may think and let think; do, or leave undone; and change, improve, modify, or abolish, as the condition of human affairs may warrant or demand.

The policy of John Wesley, and his fellow-laborers and sons in the gospel, certainly was that just suggested. In the beginning, Mr. Wesley did not conceive the idea of forming a society at all. Afterward, however, he consummated such an organization as he found to be suitable and necessary. But this organization

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was not a distinct sect, holding a particular formal creed, or prescribing any exclusive method and ceremonies of worship. It was *a society in the church.* Hence, those connected with the "societies," were earnestly and repeatedly warned of the evil of separating from the church. They were also urged to attend the ordinances, and receive the sacraments, as administered by the church.

And this course was continued a number of years; at least, as long as it was deemed expedient and proper. However, as providential indications were given, and the wants of any particular time or place were clearly developed, Methodism modified its instrumentalities and changed its position. And this was done, not only without any violation of the general principles already noticed, but also in strict conformity and obedience thereto. These principles, which at one time required the followers of Mr. Wesley to insist upon being known in the world, as a part of the church, have since demanded another and directly opposite attitude. And again, Mr. Wesley, who declared at one time, if he should enter a chapel, and find the people sitting together, he would immediately go thence; at a subsequent period, was induced to permit men and women to sit together in the City Road chapel, London, and elsewhere. And the same cause or rule of action, which in one period of the history of Methodism, led to the general observance of the regulation, "let the men and

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women sit apart in all our congregations," has since, throughout the United Kingdom, made it *obsolete*. These things, paradoxical as they may seem, are facts of history that cannot be denied. The principle, which at different times, and in different circumstances, produced these opposite results, is set forth in the assumption, that it is the duty of God's ministers, and the church, to adopt such methods for the dissemination of scriptural holiness, as the general state of human affairs may render indispensable and available.

In view of this principle, when Mr. Wesley could not preach in the churches erected for the public worship of God, he went out into the fields, and there proclaimed the truth to wondering thousands, who were saved by his ministry, and who otherwise, never would have heard him. If he could not secure the services of the *regular clergy*, he deemed it advisable to employ *lay preachers*. And carrying with him every where the conviction, that it was his chief business, as a minister of the gospel, to preach "Christ and him crucified," and not to build up a *sect or party*, he entered every open door, and gladly availed himself of every opportunity to instruct and save the souls of men. And such has been the course almost uniformly pursued by the followers of Wesley — especially those who were his companions in labor and his immediate successors.

Hence it is concluded, that in the judgment of these "fathers" in Israel — and who could better understand

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it?—Methodism consisted, as has been represented by an able defender of our faith, in laying hold of, and *holding fast to those cardinal doctrines of the gospel*, and applying itself with all its energy, to propagate them far and near; embracing every opening of Divine providence, taking advantage of every new development in the administration of the world, and using all instrumentalities within its grasp to advance the cause of Christ. Prejudice, bigotry, or sectarian ambition, may direct us to adopt some other rule of action. But that which has just been stated, is *Methodism*. Any thing else, in this connection is unworthy the name.

The mind and heart inspired with the catholic genius, and thrilling prospects of such a system, will be placed far beyond the influence of those narrow and exclusive notions, which annihilate from the soul the ennobling and comprehensive views and purposes of true christianity. Bigotry and Methodism can never dwell together. As well might we attempt to create harmony between Christ and Belial. *Methodists*, it is true, may become *bigots*. But it is always at the cost of all the peculiar features of Methodism. A *Methodist bigot*, is the most singular and unseemly paradox, of which the mind can have any conception. Methodism is not a mere sectarian form of christianity, but a system of religious and moral enterprise, which imparts to all who are governed by its principles, the most enlarged and far-reaching charities that can dwell in the heart of man.

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CHAPTER IV.

METHODISM IN AMERICA.

Several members of society remove to America—Society formed in New York, by P. Embury, 1766—Thomas Webb preaches in hired room—R. Strawbridge preaches and establishes a society in Maryland—First church built—Boardman and Pillmoor volunteer for the work in America—Asbury and others sent over—First regular conference held in Philadelphia, June 1773—Authority of Mr. Wesley recognized—Doctrine and discipline of Methodism adopted—Preachers agree not to administer the ordinances—Advised to this course by Mr. Wesley—Suffered much inconvenience—Found necessary to relieve the government of societies of its British element—Organization of church determined upon—Coke and Asbury appointed superintendents—Whatcoat and Vasey elders—Wesley's letter on the subject—Introduced at length to vindicate his conduct—Places him in a true position concerning question of American Independence—His views of episcopacy—Aversion to title of bishop—Letter on this subject to Mr. Asbury—Wesley undoubtedly mistaken in his judgment of Asbury and Coke—Propriety of his views relative to the use and abuse of the title—Reasons inducing organization of the church—Folly of appealing to antiquity in defense of any particular usage—Methodism in England and America a special system.

HAVING, in the last chapter, treated of Methodism, as understood and practiced by Mr. Wesley, and others connected with him, it is proposed now to make a few observations upon *Methodism in America*. Several members of the Methodist societies in England and Ireland emigrated to this country, and some of them kept

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in remembrance their heavenly calling. They brought with them the spirit and views of their "father in Christ." Consequently, so soon as opportunity was presented, they united together to call upon God for help, and went forth to warn and save their fellow-men. The first society was formed by Philip Embury, a local preacher from Ireland, in New York, 1776. The same year, Thomas Webb preached in a hired room, near the barracks, occupied by the soldiers in the service of the crown. This individual was an officer in the British army. He was converted to God under the ministry of Wesley, who speaks of him as a "man of fire," and bears ample testimony to his zeal and usefulness. He addressed the people in his military costume. This circumstance, together with his warmth and earnestness of manner, attracted much attention. He made several excursions upon Long Island, and went as far as Philadelphia, preaching the "unsearchable riches of Christ" in every place where the people were willing to hear.

While Embury and Webb were at work in New York and other places, Mr. Robert Strawbridge, who also was a local preacher from Ireland, settled in Frederick county, Maryland. He immediately commenced warning sinners to flee the wrath to come. Many were awakened and converted. The first Methodist church was built in the city of New York. Mr. Embury preached the first sermon in this building, October 30, 1768. It remained until the year 1818, when it was

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taken down, and another reared in its place. This last, in a few years, was also taken down, and the neat and commodious building now standing, was erected. In the year 1769, Messrs. Boardman and Pillmoor — preachers who labored under the direction of Wesley — volunteered their services, and were appointed to take charge of the societies already established in the country, and to look after the spiritual welfare of the people. Afterward, Messrs. Asbury, Wright, Rankin, Shadford, Coke, Vasey, and Whatcoat, were sent over, charged with the mission of governing the societies, and furnishing to them the bread of life.

The first regular conference was held in Philadelphia, June, 1773. From the record of their proceedings, it appears there were in the connexion at that time, ten preachers, and eleven hundred members. At this conference, the authority of Mr. Wesley, and the doctrine and discipline of the Methodists, were formally recognized and adopted. They also agreed unanimously not to administer the sacraments, and all the members were exhorted to attend the church and receive the ordinances there.

In this course, they were influenced by the advice of Mr. Wesley. Still it occasioned them many inconveniences—especially during, and after the war of Independence. Consequently, the attention of Mr. Wesley was frequently directed to the state of things in America, which was constantly becoming more important and

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perplexing. The political relations existing between the two countries, had assumed such an attitude, that it became apparent, something must be done to relieve the government exercised over these societies of its *British element*, this seemed to be too prominent for the American feeling to endure. Many grave questions were presented to the mind of Mr. Wesley, in meditating upon what should be done in the emergency, resulting as above stated. At length, however, all his scruples and misgivings upon the various points in the controversy, were entirely relieved. Being pursuaded he was called by Providence and the "usage of the fathers," to do that for Methodism in America which would disentangle it from all foreign alliances, and control, he determined to organize a distinct church. Accordingly, he appointed Dr. Coke and Mr. Asbury *superintendents;* and Messrs. Whatcoat and Vasey *elders*, to baptize and administer the sacrament of the Lord's supper. The following is his letter on this subject:

"Bristol, Sept. 10th, 1784.

To Dr. Coke, Mr. Asbury, and our brethren in America:

By a very uncommon train of providences, many of the provinces of North America are totally disjoined from the British empire and erected into independent states. The English government has no authority over them, either civil or ecclesiastical, any more than

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over the states of Holland. A civil authority is exercised over them, partly by the congress, and partly by the state assemblies. But no one either *exercises* or *claims* any ecclesiastical authority at all. In this peculiar situation, some thousands of the inhabitants of these states desire my advice; and, in compliance with their desire, I have drawn up a little sketch.

Lord King's account of the primitive church, convinced me many years ago, that bishops and presbyters are the *same order*, and have the *same right to ordain*. For many years I have been importuned, from time to time, to exercise this right, by ordaining part of our traveling preachers; but I have still refused, not only for peace sake, but because I was determined as little as possible to violate the established order of the national church to which I belonged.

But the case is widely different between England and North America. Here there are bishops who *have* a legal jurisdiction. In America there *are none*, and but few parish ministers; so that for some hundreds of miles together, there is none either to baptize or to administer the Lord's supper. Here, therefore, my scruples are at an end; and I conceive myself at full liberty, as I violate no order, and invade no man's right, by appointing and sending laborers into the harvest.

I have accordingly appointed Dr. Coke, and Mr. Francis Asbury, to be *joint superintendents* over our

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brethren in America; as, also, Richard Whatcoat, and Thomas Vasey to act as elders among them, by baptizing and administering the Lord's supper. And I have prepared a liturgy little differing from that of the church of England, (I think the best constituted national church in the world,) which I advise all the traveling preachers to use on the Lord's day in all the congregations; reading the litany only on Wednesdays and Fridays, and praying extempore on all other days. And I also advise the elders to administer the supper of the Lord on every Lord's day. If any one will point out a more rational and scriptural way of feeding these sheep in the wilderness, I will gladly embrace it. At present, I cannot see any better method than that I have taken.

It has indeed been proposed, to desire the English bishops to ordain a part of our preachers for America. But to this I object: (1) I desired the bishop of London to ordain one only, but could not prevail. (2) If they consented, we know the slowness of their proceedings; but the matter admits of no delay. (3) If they would ordain them now, they would likewise expect to govern them. And how grievously would this entangle us. (4) As our American brethren are now totally disentangled from both the state, and from the English hierarchy, we dare not entangle them again either with the one or the other. They are now at full liberty simply to follow the scriptures and the primitive church.

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And we judge it best that they should stand fast in that liberty wherewith God has so strangely made them free.

JOHN WESLEY."

The foregoing letter of Mr. Wesley, is introduced at length, because it is deemed the most clear exposition, and conclusive defense of his views and conduct, in the case, that can be made. It also places him in a proper position in reference to the question of American Independence. This he attributes to the wise providence of God; and declares it to be, in his judgment, best for the inhabitants of the states to "stand fast in the liberty wherewith God had so strangely made them free."

In ordaining or appointing Dr. Coke and Mr. Asbury to be superintendents to govern the societies in America, Mr. Wesley, justice compels us to say, had no sympathy with the high prerogatives sometimes claimed for the episcopacy. He evidently understood the office to be one of supervision or oversight. In other words, the superintendency to which he promoted these men, was *merely an office*, and not a *ministerial order*, in the church. He has occasionally been referred to as holding high church notions concerning episcopacy, etc. Whatever may have been his views of these topics, in connection with the established church, so far as the societies under his care in England or America, were concerned, he despised every thing like high-sounding

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names and titles. Hence, in the credentials which he furnished Dr. Coke, he and Mr. Asbury are proclaimed *joint superintendents*. He used the term, "superintendents," because it conveyed an idea of the *office*, to which these men were elevated; and because of his aversion to the title of *bishop*.

His opinions and feelings on this point, may be gathered from a communication to Mr. Asbury, dated London, Sept. 20th, 1788, from which we make the following extract: "There is indeed a wide difference between the relation wherein you stand to the *Americans*, and the relation wherein I stand to the *Methodists*. You are the *elder brother* of the American Methodists. I am, under God, the *father* of the whole family. Therefore, I naturally care for you all in a manner no other person can do. Therefore, I, in a measure, provide for you all; for the supplies which Dr. Coke provides for you, he could not provide were it not for me — were it not that I not only permit him to collect, but also support him in so doing. But, in one point, my dear brother, I am a little afraid, both the Doctor and you differ from me. I study to be little; you study to be great. I creep; you strut along. I found a school; you a college! nay, and call it after your own names. Oh! beware. Do not seek to be something. Let me be nothing, and 'Christ be all in all.' One instance of this — of your greatness — has given me great concern. How can you, how dare you suffer

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yourself to be called a *bishop?* I shudder — I start at the very thought. Men may call me *a knave or a fool, a rascal, a scoundrel,* and I am content; but they never shall, by my consent, call me *bishop.* For my sake, for God's sake, for Christ's sake, put a full end to this."

That Mr. Wesley was entirely mistaken in supposing Dr. Coke and Mr. Asbury were seeking to become great, and had a fondness for titles of distinction, may be proved by referring to their labors and manner of life. Mr. Asbury, indeed, was a model of simplicity, and as little disposed to the vanity insinuated in the letter just quoted, as Mr. Wesley himself. We may, perhaps, account for the seeming severity here used, by the fact that Mr. Wesley's name, the previous year, was left off the American Minutes, and some designing persons had sought to misrepresent to him Mr. Asbury in other respects. Even at that period there were "busy bodies" among us, who reproached the cause of truth, and injured "the brethren."

Mr. Wesley most certainly intended to create a *scriptural* episcopacy for the superintendence of the Methodists of the United States. But he objected to the use of the *title* of bishop, because of its grievous abuse. He gave us the *thing* with a more suitable and less offensive *name.* And although the assumption of the title has been ably defended, the fitness and propriety of the views expressed by Mr. Wesley in this letter, may yet be seen and felt, notwithstanding he believed

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himself and those he promoted, to be bishops in the *scriptural* sense and use of the term. Names and titles may become sources of great mischief and annoyance. It has, to a great extent, been the case, save in our own church, wherever the title of bishop has been used, the idea of a superior order in the ministry has obtained. Indeed, among us, there are some who are of this opinion. The imposition of hands, and other ceremonies connected with the *ordination* of persons elected to the *superintendency*, may have had some effect in this direction. Hence, when any of our bishops, by ill health or otherwise, have become unable to perform the duties of their office, they are continued therein. But taking into consideration our avowed doctrines — the only doctrines we can maintain upon the subject — they should have been placed in the relation of supernumerary or superannuated preachers.

The important step taken by our "fathers," in the organization of a church — a distinct religious denomination — was undoubtedly judicious and necessary. So grave and responsible a movement, however, was not taken without much deliberation and prayer. An emergency arose which could be met in no other way. And Mr. Wesley both advised this course, and admitted it to be necessary. Hence, although they had declared it to the world, in answer to an inquiry relative to the design of Providence in raising up the preachers called Methodists, their mission was not to *form any new sect;*

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but to reform the continent, particularly the church, and to spread scriptural holiness over these lands: a new class of circumstances having taken place, they adopted the measure in good faith, and in accordance with the true spirit of Methodism.

At the close of the revolutionary struggle between the colonies and Great Britain, the civil aspects and relations of this question were entirely changed. The American colonies of Great Britain had become the *United States of America*. The societies, under Mr. Wesley's care in this country, at the time referred to, had acquired considerable influence and strength. They numbered near fifteen thousand members, and eighty-three preachers. For the government and success of this body of religious and devoted men, no further provision could have been made directly by Mr. Wesley, without great embarrassment. The animosities awakened between the two countries, rendered it necessary for the Methodists of the United States to free themselves from all entanglements arising from their acknowledgment of the authority of so loyal a subject of Great Britain. This implied no want of respect toward Mr. Wesley. But, being fully aware that Methodism never could succeed, encumbered with a controlling agency, of the character, and from the source just mentioned, notwithstanding all their previous declarations, they resolved to form themselves into a church, under the direction of "superintendents, elders, dea-

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cons, and helpers." This was done according to certain suitable forms, and with such ceremonies as seemed to be appropriate and useful.

The same principle, or rule of action, which some years before, suggested the propriety of proclaiming to the world, without disguise or reserve, that it was not their business, nor did they intend to establish any new sect or party, required of them to organize a church, and provide for the administration of the sacraments, and the preaching of the word of God. They were guided by the admonitions of Providence. Not caring for any exclusive method of operations, as circumstances seemed to make it necessary, they modified the instrumentalities they employed, and always kept in view the great object for which they were raised up—"to spread scriptural holiness through these lands." And such has been the line of conduct observed by Methodism, from the beginning unto the present day.

How far the Divine approbation has been given to this principle, and the action resulting therefrom, may be inferred from facts, which will be presented for the consideration of the reader in a subsequent chapter. At present, it will be sufficient to say, the genius of christianity, and the spirit of Methodism, unite to guard us against the *exclusive* adoption, or selection of *any* particular form, or mode of disseminating truth and holiness. We should use all the agencies we can employ—all the means we can command. And these

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will be found to vary, as time and the condition of human affairs may change. That which may be effective at one time, may not be so always; and that which may be suitable in one place, may not be in another. Hence, it is necessary for us to give attention, to what the providence of God may present for our consideration, and act, so far as we can, under the immediate direction of the Spirit, and be ready to do whatever may be found expedient and proper, in the circumstances.

It will be a sad, an ominous state of things, when the members and ministry of the Methodist Episcopal Church are led away with enthusiastic devotion to any class of the *incidental* or *non-essential* features of our system. In that event, its vitality will be lost. It then will resemble a huge, overgrown creature, perfectly imbecile and unseemly; the premature decay of which, will produce none of the respect or reverence excited by *enfeebled age*. It is but a little more than one hundred years, since the first Methodist society was formed by Mr. Wesley, in England. The Methodist Episcopal Church has not been in existence *seventy years*. And to speak of any custom, or ceremony, *peculiar to Methodism*, as deserving our support, and adherence, because of its *antiquity*, most certainly is an untenable and ridiculous position. Could we trace our genealogy back sixteen centuries, we might claim something on the ground of *antiquity*. But even

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then, the argument would be worth nothing, unless corroborated by the reasonableness and fitness of the measure itself. But for us to assign as a reason for the adoption of this or that measure, that it is according to ancient *Methodist usage*, would be rather amusing, only that it betrays a lack of intelligence, scarcely excusable, and greatly to be deplored. It is not designed by this, to intimate that the *general principles* of our economy are not in accordance with those held and practiced by the primitive church. But that the *peculiarities* of an incidental character connected with our system, are, in many instances, merely *prudential* regulations, and cannot be maintained by appealing to antiquity alone.

Finally, it may be said, Methodism in England and America, was a *special system*. It originated in as dark and unpropitious a period almost, as ever known in the history of Protestant christianity. Immorality, heresy, and spiritual death, had gained a fearful ascendancy, when it was instituted. To meet the emergency, which then existed, God raised up a company of great men—men who were great in intellectual endowment, moral excellence, and inventive genius. There was John Wesley, who has justly been designated the greatest of ecclesiastical legislators—Whitefield, the most extraordinary of pulpit orators—Charles Wesley, among the best of sacred poets—Coke, the leader of modern missionaries—Asbury, the most

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laborious of bishops—and Clark and Benson, one the most learned, the other, the best practical commentator ever known. These men devised this powerful instrumentality, well-styled, "*christianity in earnest.*" The results which have transpired, show how eminently they were fitted for the crisis they were called to meet. To secure success, they spared no pains and refused no sacrifice. Every agency they could command, however novel and irregular, they used with energy and enthusiasm. The world gazed upon them, and many beholding their work, wondered, despised it, and perished. But thousands received their mission, and were saved. To God, be all the glory.

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CHAPTER V.

DOCTRINES OF METHODISM

Methodism originally promulgated no formal creed—Questions discussed in first conferences—A creed subsequently became necessary—Doctrines of Methodism esteemed scriptural, and, to a great extent, common to all orthodox churches—Doctrine of holiness peculiar to Methodism—Sadly misrepresented and abused—Practical inconsistencies—Numerous theories—The more excellent way.

Of the doctrines of Methodism, it is necessary to say but little. Our book of discipline, containing the articles of our faith, and numerous standard publications, are so generally circulated and known, that any thing more than a mere allusion to this feature of our subject, would only consume the reader's time and patience.

It is proper, however, to say, Methodism in the beginning, promulgated no creed, at least none in the ordinary acceptation of the term. Of course, Mr. Wesley and his followers, had some form or theory of faith, and were ever ready to give a reason for the hope that was in them. Yet they seemed to have a more important work to do, than to look after *mere* forms and creeds.

In the first conferences between Mr. Wesley and his preachers, the questions discussed, embraced the nature and importance of experimental religion, and the subject

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and manner of their ministrations to the people. Repentance, faith, justification, and holiness, were themes dwelt upon at length, and examined with the greatest care and simplicity. No ostentation, no assumed titles, or imposing forms of speech, marked their proceedings. Their chief object seemed to be, to obtain and impart instruction, upon those experimental and practical truths, which the world were deeply interested to know and understand. Other matters, they esteemed of but little consequence, and undeserving their attention.

It was thus, those evangelical views of the gospel, which form a prominent feature of our economy unto this day, were imbibed, and incorporated in the elementary principles of our system. It was a happy circumstance, that those engaged in arranging the materials, out of which the superstructure, subsequently was erected, gave such preference to those of *durability and strength.*

In their public discourses, they constantly insisted upon the natural depravity of the human heart, the necessity of repentance, the means of justification before God, and the immediate attainment of holiness of heart and life. They consumed no time, and excited no angry strife, in contending for matters non-essential. In the fullness of their love and zeal for the salvation of sinners, they went forth preaching everywhere. And wherever they went, multitudes, impressed with the simplicity of their manners, the purity of their lives, and

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the power and truthfulness of their doctrine, received them as special messengers from heaven, and were saved.

In the course of time, however, it became necessary to give some permanent and tangible form, to the tenets these men advocated. As the societies, and those engaged to minister to them, in word and doctrine, became numerous, it was found, in order to preserve the body from heresy, there must be some authoritative proclamation of faith, or in other words, a *creed* was needed. This became emphatically necessary, when these societies assumed the position of a distinct religious denomination, as was the case at the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and subsequently, at the recognition of the Wesleyan Church.

Originally, it was required of those who desired to become members of the Methodist societies, simply to give evidence of a desire to "flee the wrath to come, and be saved from their sins." Since, however, we have become, in the true sense of the term, a *church*, adherence to our doctrine, and an avowed willingness to be governed by our discipline, are demanded of all, who seek a place among us. This requisition is authorized by the "fitness of things," and accords with the usages of the church in ancient and modern times.

It is proper, also, to remark, that the doctrines of Methodism, by those who hold them, are esteemed *scriptural*, and, to a great extent, are such as are common to all orthodox churches. It is true, upon some

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unimportant features of doctrine, we differ from our brethren of other denominations. But upon all those cardinal points, which stand out prominently in the Protestant faith, we think with them. The existence of God — the Trinity — the Divinity, atonement, resurrection, and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ — the sufficiency of the scriptures as a rule of faith and practice — original sin — justification by faith — the resurrection of the dead, and future rewards and punishments, are held and taught, not only by the people called Methodists, but likewise by the entire church.

There is, however, one doctrine, in a great measure peculiar to Methodism. It is that, in which we teach the possibility of man attaining a state of grace in the present life, in which he will be made free from sin. All insist, in the language of holy writ, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord" — that "nothing unclean or unholy can enter the kingdom of God." A large portion of the christian world, contend such a state of grace cannot be attained *until death.* Whether or not, this be a correct assumption, the author is not here called upon to say. His business is, to show in what sense the doctrine of Methodism, upon this point, is *peculiar.* And, without multiplying words, it is enough to remind the reader, we contend this state *may be attained now* — at the present moment. Our reasons for this, which of course we consider good and conclusive, may be gathered by the reader, as he

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passes along. They are drawn from the *nature of the work*, and the *means by which it is accomplished.*

This doctrine has occasionally been sadly misrepresented, and abused. In the first place, a great many have made professions in reference to their experience on the subject, whose practical inconsistencies, have given great occasion of stumbling to others. Some wild and deluded enthusiast, obtains, what he considers the blessing of sanctification; and, in the excitement of the moment, proclaims the fact aloud. Such a man, at the same time, may possess all the pride, irritability, and petulency, incident to persons of his temperament. He cannot endure the least contradiction, but commences admonishing and reproving the preachers and others, concerning their coldness; and in the most uncharitable manner possible, passes judgment upon all who do not happen to be as he is. In a short time, the ardor of his spirit is dampened, his enjoyments all fail, and the gloom of midnight takes the place of noonday. In this latter state he remains, until the period arrives to be moved again. And thus the same results are repeated again and again. These reflections, are justified by numerous instances, which might be furnished, were it deemed necessary.

Another means of abuse in this matter, will be found in the numerous theories that have been published; some teaching one thing, and some another. Learned and labored essayists have taxed their powers to the

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utmost, to explain a subject already glowing with enrapturing simplicity. And almost *multitudes* of newspaper correspondents, gathering inspiration from their own experience, have in their turn, advanced something new or different from any thing before published. It would have been much better for many of these, and for the church, had they contented themselves with urging, that holiness consists in keeping the two great commandments — "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy mind, with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and thy neighbor as thyself."

The observance of these commandments, whether designated *sanctification*, *perfection*, *holiness*, or any other kindred term, is a matter of little moment. That state of mind and heart, in which a man is prepared to render the obedience here required, is beyond all controversy, a state of "*true holiness*." Whether such a state, may or may not be obtained, at the time of justification — whether instantaneous or progressive — and many other similar inquiries, that have been conducted with unusual vehemency, are questions of but little consequence. Holiness is more a matter of experience and practice, than of theory and discussion. "*Love*," we are told by an inspired writer, is the fulfilling of the law. And that believer, who exercises this grace, to the full extent of his powers, in obedience to these two "great commandments," on which "hang all the law and the prophets," despite all theories and controversies, may

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be said, in the proper sense of the phrase, to be a *perfect christian.* He who stands in this grace, may indeed rejoice in hope of the glory of God, and exclaim — "thanks be unto God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

It may be interesting, and perhaps instructive, to examine with candor, and in the light of scripture, many of the questions, doctrinal and practical, which have been discussed in connection with this important subject. The "more excellent way," however, it is apprehended, is to seek with earnest and believing prayer, this great blessing. The time spent in argument and discussion, to sustain any particular theory, would be much better employed in crying out at the "mercy-seat," "create within me a clean heart, O God; renew within me a right spirit." In this, as well as in our justification, "we are saved by grace, through faith." And being obtained by faith, we should constantly look for it. Reader, thou mayest *now* believe, and *now* be saved from all thy sins.

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CHAPTER VI.

DISCIPLINE OF METHODISM

Two interpretations of term discipline—Three distinct departments—Discipline now in use—First edition published, 1785—Some of its provisions soon abandoned—Fundamental and mandatory features—Incidental and advisory—Rule concerning pew churches, etc.—Article of faith touching forms and ceremonies—Rule advisory—Various arguments—Annual conferences to use their influence, &c.—Propriety of making exceptions to the rule—Objections to this considered—Numerous and important facts presented—Vitality and power of Methodism depend neither upon free seats, or pews.

THE reader's attention will now be directed to the *discipline of Methodism.* There are two interpretations which may be given to the term *discipline.* It may be understood as the *published rules and regulations*, or the *actual government* of the church, as administered by those whose business it is, to see that its provisions are observed. Some, perhaps, may not, at the first view, discover any particular difference between the *book* of discipline, and the *discipline* itself. And yet there is, in many particulars, a great difference. Both, however, to a certain extent, may be understood as the law of the church; one the law of *usage*, the other that of *enactment.*

Let us contemplate, in the first place, the book or

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published discipline. Of course it is designed to confine our remarks to the discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church. To the discipline of the Wesleyan connexion, we shall make but incidental allusions. The book to which we invite attention, is a small volume, that may be read in a short time. Yet its contents, to be properly understood, require diligent, and patient study and investigation. It is to be seriously regretted, that so few of either our friends or enemies, take time to *read*, much less examine, and understand the principles and measures of our government. Without giving themselves the least trouble to know what the discipline is, many array themselves against it; and in their zeal to oppose it, will be almost certain to misrepresent our economy and usages; while others, in like manner, adopt and approve them, but when assailed, are unable to defend them. In either case, true Methodism will be misapprehended and injured, more or less.

The discipline contains three distinct departments. The first embraces an account of the origin, doctrines, and *administrative* rules of our church. The second delineates the *ritual*, or mode of administering the ordinances, and conducting the public worship of God. The third department, presents an outline of our *temporal economy*, and marks out the boundaries of the several annual conferences; gives directions concerning the appointment and duties of trustees and stewards;

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the manner of procedure in building churches, etc., etc., etc. The whole opens a field of interesting thought, and in many respects, is the best—the most efficient, form of church government, known in the world. A more wise, or better arranged system of religious and moral enterprize, could not have been conceived. Of course, like all other human institutions, it has defects and imperfections. These, however, may be remedied by due attention to circumstances, and a just respect for the guidance of Heaven.

The form of discipline now in use, differs widely from that by which the fathers were governed. The "Large Minutes," which contained the "general rules," and numerous other regulations, adopted by Mr. Wesley from time to time, in his conferences with the preachers he employed, were considered the discipline of the *societies*, previous to the organization of the *Methodist Episcopal Church*. The general principles this publication embraced, were incorporated into the governmental arrangements of the church.

At various periods, as it was found expedient or necessary, these rules and regulations were abolished, changed, or improved; until at length, the form now in use, was completed. The first edition of the discipline was published in the year 1785, and was bound up with what was designated the "Sunday service," and a collection of psalms and hymns. The form of the "Sunday service," not being in harmony with the

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views and feelings of the church in general, although it was prepared and recommended by Mr. Wesley, was soon abandoned. The psalms and hymns were converted into a separate hymn book. In the year 1787, the discipline was entirely remodeled. This work seems to have been done chiefly by bishop Asbury. He was assisted therein by Rev. J. Dickens. And at subsequent periods of time, as occasion has required, numerous and important changes and additions have been made. The General Conference, for many years past, at each session, have appointed a committee, known as the committee on *revisal*. It is the business of this committee to consider such modifications or improvement of our economy, as may be desired by the people, or are deemed just and prudent. In this manner, it will be seen, our system of government has gradually assumed its present form, and from the beginning has been wisely adapted to the wants of the world and the interests of the church. To this constant and well-directed course of *innovation* and improvement, we are indebted for the adaptation, or suitableness of our system; and to this adaptation, and the zeal and piety of the church, under God, we owe our success.

Had the spirit evinced by those opposed to change and progress, guided the deliberations and movements of Methodism, instead of now possessing a glory that "fills all lands," it would have become long since, a feeble, inappropriate, and exhausted system. Its

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introduction into the religious world, and immediate results, might have filled a page of the history of human affairs; but it would many years ago, have ceased to exist as a means of propagating the truth, and saving the souls of men.

There are, however, certain portions of our discipline, which involve *fundamental* points of doctrine and practice. These can never be essentially changed. We advert to the *articles of faith*, *itinerancy*, and *class-meetings*. In consequence of the improvement of language, the peculiar *phraseology* in which our doctrines are stated, may be changed; but the doctrines therein taught, cannot. The circumstantial and incidental arrangements connected with the itinerancy, may be modified; but the *system* must continue unimpaired. The position of class-meetings, in relation to the entire system, may be altered; but the *institution* itself must continue substantially the same. If in these things, any material variation should take place, we will be undone. In that event, we shall be "shorn of our strength." And there may be another people raised up, to whom will be committed the soul-inspiring work, to which, in the providence of God, we have been called.

There are other portions of our discipline, which, from the beginning, have been esteemed *advisory*. These have been observed, or disregarded at discretion. And although, in some instances, they may

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retain the *form* of positive enactments; for reasons which hereafter will be stated, in the true and proper sense of *law*, they are *obsolete*. They remain in the book, and when and where circumstances make it *advisable*, are observed. We are aware that the phrase, "advisory rule," etc., seems to be a paradox. But we should remember, the import of words is frequently determined by their conventional use. Hence, opposite as may be the nature of *rule* and *advice*, in their common accceptation, general usage may sanction and approve their combination. But we are not disposed to contend about *words*. Hence, we will permit those who differ from us, to gain all they can, by disputing about the mere phraseology of the subject. Something of greater consequence demands our attention.

In that part of the discipline which treats of the means of grace, public worship, singing, etc., there are certain recommendations, or "*advisory*" regulations, which are, and always have been acted upon, with reference to circumstances. The direction to use the form of discipline in the administration of the ordinances, and the burial of the dead, and the repetition of the Lord's prayer on all occasions of public worship, are observed at the discretion of the minister in charge, and others, who may conduct the religious services of the people.

We are directed in the discipline, not to permit any man to sing with the women, "unless he *understands*

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the notes and sings the bass, as it is composed in the tune book." These, and numerous other directions, *rules* or regulations, although they may be in the *form*, have never been interpreted, acted upon, or understood among us, in the sense of the *law*, but as the *advice* of the constitutional authorities of the church. And being such, they may be observed or *disregarded*, as the parties advised, judge best and suitable.

The rule in relation to "men and women sitting apart in our congregations," and building "pew churches," must be reckoned in the class just mentioned. In the section which sets forth the order to be observed in erecting new churches, the following language occurs: "As it is contrary to our economy to build houses with pews to sell or rent, it shall be the duty of the several annual conferences to use their *influence to prevent* houses from being so built in future; and, as *far as possible*, to make those houses free which have already been built with pews." In the chapter containing *directions* to be observed in "public worship," this question is asked: "Is there any exception to the rule — 'Let the men and women sit apart?' Answer. There is no exception. Let them sit apart in all our churches."

The enemies of our economy, have frequently urged as an objection, the alleged inconsistency, between our practice and our rules, upon the points referred to. And they have been encouraged to do this, by the

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misguided zeal of some of our friends. It is a fact, our discipline directs that men and women shall sit apart in all our congregations, and that our churches shall be built with free seats. It is also true, that in at least three-fourths of the annual conferences, to a greater or less extent, these regulations are disregarded. Here is apparently a great inconsistency. It is, however, only in appearance. The difficulty involved, is in the interpretation of the rules and admonitions in question. If it be true, that these rules and admonitions are to be understood as the *law* of the church, then, indeed, the charge of inconsistency is well founded. But if they be esteemed, as it is evident they should be, the mere *advice* or counsel of the constitutional authorities, then our course from the beginning, has been perfectly correct. *Law* is, in a measure, absolute, and admits no conditions or exceptions, unless they are named, or necessarily inferred. *Advice*, however, has no *legal* force; and is binding in a *moral* aspect, no farther than its fitness and suitableness are made to appear to the *persons to whom it is given*. All christians, morally speaking, are as much required to *receive* good advice, as to *obey* law. Yet, as before intimated, *advice*, to be of any force whatever, must be shown to be good and proper. That the regulations, we now intend to examine, and the true import of which we desire to comprehend, should be understood not as *mandatory*, but *advisory*, may be proven by the following considerations.

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The inquiry concerning the rule, directing men and women to sit apart in our congregations, occurs, as has already been stated, in the section which treats of public worship, singing, etc. The doctrine of Methodism, in reference to modes, rites, and ceremonies connected with the services of the sanctuary, may be gathered from the twenty-second article of our faith, which reads thus: "It is not necessary that rites and ceremonies should in all places be the same, or exactly alike: for they have always been different, and may be changed according to the diversity of countries, times, and *men's manners*, so that nothing be ordained against God's word. Whosoever, through his private judgment, willingly and purposely doth openly break the rites and ceremonies of the church to which he belongs, which are not repugnant to the word of God, and are ordained and approved by common authority, ought to be rebuked openly, that others may fear to do the like, as one that offendeth against the common order of the church, and woundeth the consciences of weak brethren. Every particular church may ordain, change, or abolish rites and ceremonies, so that all things may be done to edification."

We have made this quotation at length, that we may not be accused of unfairness. In the latter part of the article, we are taught, that the usages and ceremonies of the church, should not be departed from, or violated by any one, through his "*private judgment*" — that is,

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upon his own responsibility, and without due authority. There must be some official, conventional, or authoritative recognition, or sanction of the deviation or change, that may be desired. Where this is given, the ritual of religion, and the circumstances of public worship, may be varied to suit the "diversity of countries, times, and men's manners." Such, at least, is the teaching of the article of our faith, just quoted.

We now propose to show, that the rule in question, has been disregarded or set aside, *in certain circumstances*, ever since Methodism was instituted; and this, too, with the knowledge, consent, and approbation of all the chief authorities of the church. Perhaps, however, it will be said, the *rule* of which we speak, cannot properly be considered one of the rites or ceremonies of the church, but is a direction, setting forth the manner of their observance. So much the better for our argument. This, instead of weakening our position, adds to its strength and consistency. For if the rites and ceremonies of public worship, as appointed and directed by the church, may be changed or improved, to meet the various phases of human society, and the peculiar exigencies of time, place, and circumstances; then it is clear, the *manner of their* observance may also be modified, or set aside, as deemed proper by those concerned. The *lesser*, of course, is not of more moment than the *greater*.

In our church, from the time, "beyond which the

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memory of man runneth not to the contrary," there have been pew churches, and men and women have sat together. This, it is admitted of course, has not been the general economy or usage of the church. Yet our economy or general usage, has always been to *permit, tolerate,* or *endure* these things. While, therefore, it is conceded it is at variance with our economy, as a *general* custom, or arrangement, to build our churches with pews to sell or rent, or for men and women to sit promiscuously in our congregations; it is nevertheless contended, it is in accordance therewith, to permit exceptions to the rule, *whenever the people desire to make them.* The free seat system, and the custom of men and women sitting apart in our congregations, have always been the policy of the church; but not more so than to permit our members to build churches with pews, and families to sit together, whenever those concerned, have judged it proper to do so.

Mr. Wesley, and others associated with him, tolerated and endured, if they did not encourage and entirely approve, the exceptions referred to. It is true, Mr. Wesley did declare, if he should come into any new house, and see the men and women sitting together, he would immediately go out. Yet afterward, he preached perhaps hundreds, if not thousands of sermons, in churches where there were pews, and men and women sat together. In justice to his memory,

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we make the following quotation from his works: vol. v, p. 235. It occurs in a record of certain conferences between him and the ministers and preachers associated with him; and was a part of the original discipline of the societies under his care, in England and America.

The following questions are asked and answered. "Question 63. Is any thing farther advisable with regard to building? Answer. Build all preaching houses, where the ground will permit, in the octagon form. It is the best for the voice, and on many accounts, more commodious than any other. Why should not any octagon house be built after the model of Yarm? Any square house after the model of Bath or Scarborough? Can we find any better model? Let the roof rise only one-third of its breadth. This is the true proportion. Have doors and windows enough; and let all the windows be sashes, opening downward. Let there be no Chinese paling, and no tub pulpit, but a square projection, with a long seat behind. Let there be no pews and *no backs to the seats*, which should have aisles on each side, and be parted in the middle by a rail running all along, to divide the men from the women, just as at Bath. Let all the preaching houses be built plain and decent; but not more expensive than is absolutely unavoidable: otherwise, the necessity of raising money, will make rich men necessary to us. But if so, we must be dependent

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upon them, yea, and governed by them. And then farewell to the Methodist discipline, if not doctrine too. Whereever a preaching house is built, see that lodgings for the preachers be built also.

Question 64. Is there any exception to the rule, 'Let the men and women sit apart?' Answer. In those galleries where they have always sat together, they may do so still. But let them sit apart everywhere below, and in all new erected galleries.

Question 65. But how can we secure their sitting apart there? Answer. I must do it myself. If I come into any new house, and see the men and women sitting together, I will immediately go out. I hereby give public notice of this. Pray let it be observed.

Question 66. But there is a *worse* indecency than this creeping in among us—talking in the preaching houses before and after service. How shall this be cured? Answer. Let all the preachers join as one man, and the very next Sunday they preach in any place, enlarge on the impropriety of talking before and after service, and strongly exhort them to do it no more. In three months, if we are in earnest, this vile practice will be banished out of every Methodist congregation. Let none stop until he has carried his point.

Question 67. Is there not another shocking indecency frequently practiced by men against the walls of a preaching house, enough to make any modest woman blush? Answer. There is. But I beg any one who

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sees another do this, will give him a hearty clap on the back.

Question 68. Complaint has been made, that sluts spoil our houses. How may we prevent this? Answer. Let none that has spoiled one, ever live in another. But what a shame is this! A preacher's wife should be a pattern of cleanliness in her person, clothes, and habitation. Let nothing slatternly be seen about her; no rags, no dirt, no litter. And she should be a pattern of industry; always at work, either for herself, her husband, or the poor. I am not willing that any should live in the orphan house at Newcastle, or any preaching house, who does not conform to this rule."

We do not introduce these things, that the conduct of our fathers may appear singular, or ridiculous. But rather, to expose the folly of making them sanction a custom, reasons for the observance of which, it is impossible to find, except in a particular class of circumstances.

There can be nothing more evident, than, that these rules and admonitions, were adapted to a rude and uncultivated state of society, and designed to meet the special exigency then existing. They answered their purpose. And now, that a different state of society has obtained, and the relative position of Methodism has changed, they may be laid aside, or altered, as shall be found necessary. The prohibition of *backs to the seats*; and permission being given for men and

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women to sit together in the *galleries*, while at the same time, it was not allowed to those who occupied the lower part of the house; and indeed the whole of these measures, it is so obvious were *advisory*, or intended to meet a *particular exigency*, that it is an insult to common sense, to suppose any argument necessary to prove it. The exigency, or occasion, that induced them, having passed away, so far as the Wesleyan Methodists, and large portions of the Methodist Episcopal Church are concerned, the measures and rules themselves have been virtually repealed, or have become *obsolete*.

The idea of renting pews or seats, among our Wesleyan brethren, is so common, that there is a regular provision made in their discipline for the appointment, by the board of trustees, holding a chapel or chapels for their use, of one of their number, as a steward or treasurer, to receive the SEAT RENTS, etc., and disburse them as directed in the deed by which the property is held. Dr. Durbin gives us to understand, in his observations on Wesleyan Methodism in England, that the pew system there is in general use. There is also an article in their discipline, in which, among other duties enjoined, the trustees are directed to *collect seat rents*. And this, as before intimated, is to meet a provision of their economy, by which pew or seat rents, are recognized as a portion of the regular revenues of the Connexion.

All this may be admitted, and yet some will still insist,

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that the occasional use of pews is anti-Methodistic. And they will not hesitate to say, that Mr. Wesley, and the discipline of the Wesleyan connexion, were also inconsistent, and anti-Methodistic. With persons of this class, we have no inclination to hold a controversy. It must, for the present, suffice to say, Mr. Wesley's conscientious deference to circumstances, and the leadings of Providence, will satisfactorily explain his conduct, and vindicate his good name against such an aspersion. In the same manner, we may justify and defend the position, in reference to these points, now occupied by his sons in the gospel. To this feature of the argument, further allusion may be made hereafter.

That the reader may be assured the views of Mr. Wesley, and the position of the English Methodists, have not been misapprehended, or unfairly stated, one or two incidents in point, may here be named. Dr. Newton, when a representative of the Wesleyan Methodists to the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, in reply to an inquiry in relation to the custom of the body he represented, said "their churches were *universally* pewed, and he did not suppose Mr. Wesley *disliked it.*" Dr. Dixon, in responding to a similar inquiry, proposed on a different occasion, used the following language: "In general, I would say, the great Head of the church has left this matter an open question, to be settled by the good sense and piety of his living church. As far as I know, I now speak the

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sentiments of our people in general; in fact, we never hear any thing on the subject of free churches, as an abstract question. The rule respecting free places of worship, and the men and women sitting apart, has been, in this country, *obsolete for many years*. My belief is, it sunk into desuetude gradually. We have no rule to supercede the old practice, and it never has been made a subject of specific legislation; *each place* adopting, as to pews and free sittings, the principle *most suited to their own local circumstances*. But *none* of our chapels are now *entirely free*. This practice of erecting pews in chapels, *certainly obtained in Mr. Wesley's time*. I will give one instance, that of City Road chapel, London. This place of worship was built in 1777; that is thirteen or fourteen years before the death of Mr. Wesley, and it *was pewed from the beginning*. There were unquestionably *many others*, but I mention this one, inasmuch as City Road was, at the time in question, the principal chapel in Methodism in this country, and is still looked up to as the mother church."

Having shown that the practice of renting pews, and men and women sitting together during the season of public worship, wherever the *people desire to do so*, or deem it expedient, is in harmony with the true spirit and practice of *Wesleyan* Methodism, we may now inquire, does it conflict with the *custom of the Methodist Episcopal Church?* We answer, it does not.

It has already been admitted, that the discipline

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directs men and women shall sit apart, and our churches shall be built with free seats; and that the several annual conferences are required to use their influence, to make those churches free, already built with pews. This is the language of the *book* of discipline. But how have we interpreted these regulations, and what has been the *actual* discipline of the church? What have been the practical workings of our economy in reference to these things?

From the beginning, we have had pew churches, especially in the extreme eastern conferences, where the pew system is in *general use*. There are pew churches in New York, Philadelphia, Wilmington, Baltimore, and many other cities and towns, within the bounds of those conferences, where the *free seat* system has been generally established. Countenance was given to the erection of these churches, by the *bishops* participating in the religious ceremonies connected with laying the corner stones of such buildings, and dedicating them to the worship of God, when completed. Ministers have been appointed to the pastoral charge of congregations worshipping in such churches; annual conferences have held their sessions therein; and in every possible way, the church has recognized and approved, or tolerated and endured, the exceptions for which we contend. And in all our observations, we know of but one instance, in which any official action has been employed against the measure. We refer to the position of the Ohio

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Conference, first at Columbus, and subsequently in Dayton. But, strange as it may seem, it is nevertheless true, that at Dayton, the sessions of the conference were held in a church where the men and women sat together. The bishops who were present, and preached to the congregation thus seated, did not say a word to reprove or rebuke them. Nor did any of the ministers, who conducted the religious services of the occasion, make the slightest allusion to the subject. The conference passed certain resolutions expressing their views upon the general bearing of the question, but studiously avoided making any specific *local* application of the report and resolutions which were adopted. And after the adoption of the report and the resolutions referred to, a minister was appointed to take charge of the congregation the ensuing year, whose views were known to be such, as to give assurance that the people would not be molested in the exercise of their rights in the case. And such a minister was appointed to this church by the bishop and his council, with a full knowledge of the fact, that the members of said church, intended to continue to sit promiscuously, etc. This purpose was frankly and repeatedly avowed, in a written communication to the authorities, and by personal interviews with the bishop, presiding elders, and other prominent members of the conference. It was also expressly stated, and clearly understood by all concerned, that no minister would be received by this

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congregation, if it were known to be his intention in any way, to prevent, or interfere with the wishes of the people in this particular. So that despite all the action referred to, *indirectly* the Ohio Conference has *countenanced*, and beyond all controversy, has *tolerated* or *permitted* an instance, by which our position may be strengthened and confirmed.

There is yet one more consideration of importance to our argument. It is the fact, that there is not any thing *necessarily sinful*, connected with either the pew system, or promiscuous sittings. Of course, no one will contend, that herein men violate the law of God. Where there is no law, "there is no transgression." And a "thus saith the Lord," prohibiting one method, or ordaining the other, cannot be found in all the oracles of truth. But, beside this, if we contend there is any thing necessarily *immoral or sinful*, in the measures we now investigate, we place ourselves in reference to almost the entire Protestant church, and the thousands and hundreds of thousands of our own brethren, who have adopted either, in an exceedingly unpleasant position. In a word, we make it appear, by our uncharitable judgment, thus rendered, that we alone are righteous, and all who differ from us in this trivial matter, are sinners—transgressors before God. It is apprehended no intelligent man, upon due reflection, will be ready to assume such an Ishmaelitish attitude as this. If there be any who are willing to take this

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position, we may pity, but cannot stop to dispute with them. Upon minds so blinded by prejudice, argument, however conclusive and irresistible, would make no impression.

It may be *inexpedient*, for various reasons, to adopt the pew system as the general usage of the church. And so far as it is found to be inexpedient, it becomes our duty to avoid it. And there also may be circumstances, in which the free seat system will be found to be inexpedient. And so far as this may be the case, we are required to set it aside, and adopt something more efficient.

It will perhaps be contended by some, that this reasoning would be to the point, and meet the case, but for the fact that those associated with us, became members of the Methodist Episcopal Church, understandingly and voluntarily. They were, or at least they should have been, acquainted with the nature of our discipline; and in joining our communion, they assumed all the duties it requires. In this view it becomes their duty to observe all the rules and institutions of Methodism. This is a correct position, and might be urged against our view of the question in hand, with some force and propriety, but for this consideration: by our action, local and general, and authoritative, we have made the pew system, where necessary, a part of our economy. Although it is "contrary to our economy to build churches with pews

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to sell or rent," as a *general* measure, yet to build such churches where the *people* find them *necessary*, is, and always has been, a part of this economy.

Finally, if it still be contended, that the rule we are now examining, is the *law* of the church, we will answer, that, being a law *without a penalty*, it is a *nullity*. In regard to other offenses, the discipline is explicit. First, there is the general provision, which teaches, no person can be expelled the church, unless he be guilty of a crime sufficient to *exclude a person from the kingdom of grace and glory* There are a few cases named as exceptions, such as attending class-meetings—and heresy, joined with insubordination, etc. In neither of these particular cases, could the individual or society who may desire and prefer a pew church, be held to answer. Certainly it will not be assumed, that to sit *promiscuously*, or to use pews in our churches, is an offense sufficient to exclude a person from the kingdom of grace and glory. Such an assumption would keep four-fifths of the christian church out of heaven; and is too uncharitable and absurd to be entertained a moment. We were mortified and surprised, to see it intimated, not long since, by a correspondent, in one of the official papers of our church, that persons might be expelled for not obeying these regulations. At the time we read the article, we thought a strange indictment must be used in such a case. If a minister or member of our church were

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summoned to trial for such an offense, the proceedings would be singular indeed. Suppose a minister should be arraigned and expelled, for countenancing and aiding in the erection of a pewed church. He would appeal to the ensuing General Conference; and his appeal would be heard and decided upon, in a pewed Methodist church; and the audience listening thereto, would be composed of hundreds of Methodists, who perhaps have never seen a free seat church in all their lives. If members of the church were dealt with in like manner, the committee appointed to examine the charge, in all probability, would be composed, in part, of men who were converted to God, and received among us in such a church. How supremely ridiculous and absurd, a movement of this kind would be, we will not pretend to say. To illustrate our argument, let us introduce a case of the kind referred to, with the usual forms of church trials. The committe appointed by the minister in charge, and the party accused are present. After attending to preliminaries, the secretary is requested to read the indictment or charges preferred. He proceeds with much evident regret and feeling, to read as follows: "I hereby charge A. B., a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church in C., with committing a crime 'sufficient to exclude a person from the kingdom of grace and glory,' *in renting and paying for a pew, and sitting with his family* in said church, during the hours of public worship. Signed on behalf of the church,

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D——— E———, Preacher in charge." Would not such an allegation, and the consequent proceedings, be a shameless insult to the moral feeling and intelligence of every man in the country? In many cases, if there could be found ignorance and prejudice enough to push matters to such an extremity, the parties accused, could plead in defense of their conduct, the fact that they were awakened, converted to God, and joined the Methodist Episcopal Church in a pewed house, or a congregation where families were seated together. And now behold, they are to be expelled from the church for using the same means by which they were brought into her communion. However, it is said, persons might be arraigned and tried, under the general provision made for those cases in which individuals or societies, may "inveigh against our doctrine and discipline." But it is evident this regulation contemplates a factious, heretical, and turbulent opposition to both our doctrines and discipline. Nevertheless, suppose it be understood, as applicable to the circumstances above stated; but if so, how could we assume to expel a man from the sacraments and church of our Lord Jesus Christ, in one section of our work, for doing that, which in more than three-fourths of our connexion, is tolerated, permitted, *encouraged*, or endured? This would be *unity* and harmony of the strangest sort. We ought rather to say, it would be an instance of the most intolerant and inconsistent administration of church government, that can be conceived.

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But it is said, also, there may be another way of ridding the church of this pestilential evil; which we are told dropped from the wings of a certain spirit, whose escape and ascent from the pit, were so vividly portrayed a short time ago, in the periodical before alluded to. The writer intimates there may be a kind of a wholesale business made of the matter. *Whole societies* may be expelled or cut off. We believe the idea is preposterous. And the mind that can seriously entertain it, has never conceived a just and intelligent view of the charitable genius, and God-like mission of Methodism. But we apprehend, instances of such strange, and maddened folly, are very rare. And, furthermore, if all our members and ministers who prefer, or permit and encourage the pew system, are to be considered "in trespasses and in sin," upon examination, there will not be found enough of the living to bury the dead.

Moreover, if these regulations were the *law* of the church, besides being nullities, they have become *obsolete;* inasmuch as they have been violated with perfect impunity by members, ministers, bishops, conferences, and all the constitutional authorities of the church. The judicial and executive departments of our government have practically set them aside, and by their conduct have proclaimed them a *dead letter*. And where or when has any bishop, minister, or member, been called to an account for so doing? If the view

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we oppose, be correct, and all the authorities we have named, have been engaged in violating the *law* of the church, then, indeed, may we be pitied for our inconsistency. For many years we have had hundreds of pew churches, and hundreds of thousands of our members have worshipped in them. The episcopacy have extended to them their countenance and approval, by preaching therein, and furnishing to the congregations there assembled, ministerial oversight and care. And, indeed, in every possible way, we have given occasion to impartial observers, to conclude, that the rule prohibiting one measure and recommending the other, has been adjudged a merely *advisory regulation*, and never has been esteemed the *law* of the church. In this connection we should keep in view the fact, that the administration of the bishops, has been approved and indorsed by the General Conference. From these considerations, it is inferred that the rule respecting the manner in which the people shall sit in our congregations, as well as the recommendation in relation to pewed churches, should be understood not in the sense of *legal enactments*, which demand obedience; but rather as *advisory regulations*, which may or may not be observed, according to the taste and discretion of those interested.

The discipline, however, we are told, requires that annual conferences shall use their influence to prevent the erection of pew churches within their bounds, and

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make those free already built with pews. This, of course, we do not pretend to deny. The direction to build with *free seats*, was added to the section upon church building, in the year 1820; and so was the entire clause declaring the use of pews to be contrary to our economy. This fact shows that there were pew churches in use among us even at that early period of our history. Hence, it was made the duty of annual conferences, to make them free as far as practicable.

To properly understand the requirements here made, it should be kept in mind, that it is presumed, the annual conferences are composed of men who are called of God to preach the gospel *everywhere*, and to enter every "open door," to offer Christ to the souls of men. A body of this character, would of course be expected to use such means to accomplish their purpose, as are in harmony with their boast, that "*their parish is the world.*" Being ministers of the Lord Jesus, and having the spirit that directed the apostles in their world-wide mission, they would be expected to do nothing, that would in anywise embarrass their appropriate work, or circumscribe their sphere of usefulness. Hence, the manner in which this influence is to be exercised, is not specifically defined. This is left to be determined by their own sense of duty.

When the annual conferences, so far as the circumstances may require, have used their influence, and adopted measures to prevent the building of pew

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churches, and to make those free already built with pews; and the result desired, has not been obtained; what course then should be adopted? We must not forget it is possible, for the conferences to use their influence in these matters, *in vain.* After all they can do, in the way of argument and persuasion, the people may differ from them, in their judgment of what is best calculated, in this respect, to promote the glory of God, and the interests of Methodism. In such an event, what should be done? Should the ministry abandon such churches, and refuse to preach to the congregations having these preferences, the gospel of life and liberty? Could those who claim to be the successors of JOHN WESLEY, decline to render ministerial service to an "assembly of faithful men," or the *greatest sinners,* simply because they have adopted a custom, prevalent in a large proportion of the religious denominations of christendom? No, verily. The duty of *Methodist* preachers, in all such cases, evidently would be, to go to the people and direct them in the way to the land of rest.

Our discipline, and the true spirit of our institutions, make it our duty to go where the people want us, and are willing to hear and support us. The action of the Ohio Conference, some years ago, in reference to the church at Detroit, is in point. It was known that this was a pewed house; still, the conference deemed it proper, to advise that the property be secured by a

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disciplinary deed. And having done this, a minister was appointed to take charge of the congregation worshipping there. The pew system continued in use, and is practiced there unto this day. Nevertheless, they have been supplied with a minister, and remain in fellowship with us; prospering and increasing in truth and love.

In this manner, we carry out the true design of our economy, and discharge our duty to God, the church, and the world. And there is no other method, in which we can succeed in persuading those who err, to come back to the good and right way. This is the proper method for an annual conference to "use their influence."

If, however, after doing all this, as in the case just cited, an annual conference should find their influence not sufficient to induce the people to follow the *advice* suggested by the discipline, what then should we do? Without hesitation, we would say, continue to preach to them the word of God. Nothing that it is possible and *proper* for a body of ministers of Christ to do, would so certainly convert their brethren from error and sin. In all questions of this character, argument and persuasion, are of greater force than *absolute enactments;* and love is more powerful than *law.* Our chief business is not to contend about measures of a prudential character, and *circumstantial* utility; but to "preach Christ, and him crucified," to them who are willing to receive

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us. If we cannot persuade them to hear us, in reference to the matter in dispute, as we may prefer or desire, we should, nevertheless, furnish them with the means of grace, and the bread of life. This we should do, if we had opportunity, to a congregation of idolaters or Catholics — Presbyterians or Quakers — and Lutherans or infidels, or any other class. The question of the mode of sitting, while they might be willing to hear us, is of the most trifling import. In making the above allusion, of course, we will not be understood as intending to make any comparison between the several parties named. Our design is to show, that it is our duty as ministers of Christ, and the successors of the apostles and of John Wesley, to go and preach in every place the people are willing to accept our services. With our brethren of other churches we hope always to have the most unreserved fellowship; and we bid them God speed in their "work of faith, and labor of love."

Let us, for the sake of argument and illustration, suppose a case. A company of brethren, influenced by just and equitable motives and views, or possibly by prejudice, resolve to build a house in which to worship God. Inasmuch as they would not afflict or offend their brethren, they quietly and peaceably separate from them; and for various reasons, proceed to consummate their purpose to build a pewed church, notwithstanding the *advice* of the discipline, and the

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influence of the annual conference. The church is completed. A congregation has been collected. Measures have been taken to provide ample means for the support of a minister. The authorities of the church are assured that the property may be secured for the use of our ministry, to preach therein the word of God, and administer the sacraments. And the people imploringly exclaim, *come to us*, and teach us the way of salvation. In such a state of facts and circumstances, what would be our duty, as servants of Christ, and ministers of the Methodist Episcopal Church? The gospel and *Methodism* would require us promptly to enter such an "open door," and use all possible efforts to persuade our fellow men to turn from the way of transgressors, and fear God. The glory of the ministry is, to save as many souls as they can. The precise manner in which the people may prefer to *sit*, in listening to us, is a question of very small consequence indeed. If they *will hear and support us*, our duty is plain and imperative; and may not be neglected for so trifling a consideration, without justly incurring the displeasure of Heaven, and the pity or scorn of mankind.

Perhaps, however, it may here be said, that the free seat system, and the rule advising men and women to sit apart in all our congregations, are in accordance with the economy of Methodism; and that this economy, upon due trial, has been found efficient and

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successful. And, according to an old maxim, it is best to "let well enough alone." This is very true. But it is important at this point, that we keep in mind what, as we before have stated, has been the economy of Methodism? It is apprehended we have shown our economy has always tolerated and *used* pewed churches. The pew system, where deemed necessary, is not, as many seem to apprehend, a novelty or innovation. It has always been practiced by us, where our people have preferred it.

But we would inquire, is there any conflict with the free seat system, in the mere fact of a pewed church being erected in any particular place, where it may be desired or supposed to be necessary, and supplied with a minister? It seems this, after all, is the true point at issue—the main feature of the controversy. Those opposed to any and all exceptions to the rule, must sum up here. Here is all their force. They contend that the discipline requires the free seat system to be observed everywhere, and that, consequently, it is the duty of the ministers and members of our church, to oppose, to the utmost extent of their power, their brethren connected with all such congregations. And the vehemency with which, from time to time, the merits of the case have been discussed, would lead to the conclusion, that the exceptions would destroy the general rule; or, that the occasional use of pews in our church, would overthrow the free seat *system*. But

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surely this is a great mistake. There have been more or less pewed churches among us for half a century; and yet the free seat system, as the *general usage* of the church, remains unimpaired. That portion of the laity who desire pewed houses of worship, have never given evidence of any disposition to make war upon the free seat system. They do not desire that churches and congregations already established, should change their present custom. The great object to be accomplished, is, to afford an opportunity to the ministry of the Methodist Episcopal Church to preach the gospel of the Redeemer to those who, in all human probability, will not hear them any where else than in a pewed church. There are hundreds of thousands, who all their lives have been accustomed to the pew system, and who cannot be induced to worship with us, because of the method of seating our congregations. Our proposition is to establish occasionally, and *only when and where desired by the people*, a congregation, in which the prejudices and preferences of these persons may be accommodated. They are *invited and urged* to enjoy the privilege of sitting with their families, in almost every church of the land. And by yielding a little in this respect, there certainly will be as many free seat churches. The only difference will be, that we shall have *more* pewed houses. How, in that case, any material injury will arise to the general system, by stepping aside therefrom, as we *always have done*, and

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supplying the congregations having such preferences, with the word of God, and the sacraments of Christ, cannot easily be conceived.

It is alleged, however, that if the exception be permitted in one congregation, others will claim a similar privilege; and thus, in a short time, all our people will be led away from the paths of the fathers. In reply to this, it may be said, the most certain method that could be adopted to multiply pew churches, almost without number, is to persist to oppose, with uncharitable reflections, and arbitrary action, the views and wishes of the people. It matters not how much superior the free seat system may be to pews. Whenever we use opposition so unreasonable as that which selects arbitrarily a particular locality, in which to enforce a regulation, that by the uniform and most authoritative action of the church, has been adjudged *advisory*, there will be found on the part of the people, an overwhelming resistance, to pacify which, will require something more than here and there a pewed church. Of course this is but an *opinion*. It is, however, an opinion that is amply sustained in the history and progress of the republican feeling, which forms so important an element in the structure of American society. To offer a temptation to our people to arise in the majesty of their strength, and demand an entire change in our economy — a demand which the *ministry could not resist*, it would only be necessary to make it a matter

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of history, that for the *sole reason*, that the majority of the members of an annual conference, deemed it improper to have a pewed church within their bounds, the congregation worshipping in such a church, were denied a privilege, claimed and enjoyed without molestation by the laity, whereever they have desired it. This statement is made, that we may look to an issue no candid mind can fail to perceive. The author, therefore, would respectfully suggest, that the best measure to preserve the free seat system, and other important features of our economy, would be without further strife, to receive such congregations, send them a minister to look after their spiritual wants, and provide them with the institutions and ordinances of christianity, as held and observed by our church. This being done, all excitement may be allayed; and ministers and people will "pursue the even tenor of their way."

If the recognition of such a church, were calculated to produce a tithe of the desire and demand for change, that would result from a refusal to provide for those congregations who prefer the pew system, ministerial oversight and care, then, indeed, every friend of our peculiar system, might tremble for the result. Whether we are willing to heed it or not, the laity of the Methodist Episcopal Church, are seizing with avidity the idea, that "*the voice of the people is the voice of God.*" And nothing is more certain, than that this voice would be immediately aroused by the arbitrary exercise, on the

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part of the ministry, of even a *constitutional* prerogative. The effect of such usurped tyranny none can imagine. And the people once aroused, there would follow a demand for change that might produce a revolution, which would leave scarcely a vestige of the original system. The friends of Methodism, should therefore, now, more than at any former period, keep in remembrance, the deference always paid by our illustrious founder to *expediency*. His expediency, we admit, never permitted him to sacrifice principle; yet, where the salvation of souls was concerned, like St. Paul, he became "all things to all men;" and used every method to do good, the emergency demanded. If we walk in his footsteps, the result will be all that is desired, and no serious injury will occur to any part of our system. We may add, at this point, that the reasons which induce us to adopt the free seat system, may, in some circumstances, also suggest the use of pews. The free seat system is used by us, chiefly because it affords us an opportunity to preach to *many who otherwise* would not hear us at all. This, we apprehend, is in every sense, a good and sufficient reason. And it is equally so when applied to congregations who prefer to use pews. If they will not adopt the free seat system, but persist to use pews, inasmuch as by so doing we may be the means of saving many who otherwise will not hear us, it is our duty to go to them in the name of the Lord, and guide them in the way to heaven.

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Another question here arises. Inasmuch as the use of pews, etc., can be sanctioned Methodistically, only by expediency or necessity, who is to determine the question, that such a church is expedient or necessary? The ministry or the laity? Both, undoubtedly. The laity make original inquiry, and present the *fact* of necessity; the ministry judge simply of the action taken by the people. In the case supposed, such a church however has already been built, and occupied by a congregation. The question of necessity, therefore, so far as under the control of the people, has been decided. They have determined, from their knowledge of all the circumstances, that a pew church is demanded. And who can better judge of this matter, than the persons immediately interested?

The inquiry on the part of the people having been settled, it remains for the ministry to discuss simply the propriety of preaching to them the word of God. And surely this is a very plain question. In a certain sense it is *all on one side*. For if the use of pews, etc., in such a case be wrong or erroneous, what more efficient means of correction can we find, than the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. And if preaching this gospel, would be likely to establish them in the use of this system, it is right they should be established. So that in any event, we should take the pastoral oversight of them as those "who must give account." If Methodist preachers ever serve such a congregation as regular

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pastors, it is *necessary* that they do it in a pewed church. Hence, in this, and all similar cases, a *pew church is necessary.* And it was precisely this kind of necessity, ascertained and acknowledged in the manner we have stated, which excused or justified our brethren in the East in the adoption of the pew system. The correctness of this reasoning is so obvious, as to need no further comment.

Perhaps some may say, the judgment of the annual conference was, that it was not necessary to build such a church. That may or may not be. The fact that it was built, etc., closes the case in that direction. The decision, from which there can be no appeal, has been announced to the world. And in making up our judgment of the necessity involved, we must confine our inquiries to the action had by the people, merely as a question of *fact.* The ministry cannot go back and examine or determine its expediency. All we have to do, to learn our duty, is to ascertain what has been done in the premises by the people. If, however, the annual conference should anticipate, and take prospective action, condemning pew churches, promiscuous sitting, etc., as needless, injurious, and fatal to the "purity and integrity" of Methodism, how then would the case stand? What in such a state of facts would be the duty of all concerned? We reply, inasmuch as the declaration of an opinion, or the passage of mandatory and exclusive resolutions, when subsequently contrasted

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with facts as they are developed, would only prove such action to have been *hasty* and *unadvised*, the people, on the one hand, should insist upon the enjoyment and exercise of their rights; and on the other, the ministry should be ready to do their duty.

Pew churches were built in Philadelphia, Baltimore, Boston, Wilmington, and in all the principal cities and towns throughout the extreme East. The persons who decided the necessity for these churches, did not solicit permission of the bishops, conferences, or any other authority of the church, to build them. And when built, the conferences in whose territory they were erected, did not go *behind the fact that they were built*, and examine the question whether they were necessary or not. All that either the episcopacy or the conferences did, in any of the instances here cited, was simply to consider the expediency of sending them a minister to preach and exercise discipline over them. And in every case, the decision was in accordance with the preferences of the people. And to us it seems, it could not have been otherwise. Had they pursued any other course, how could they have justified their conduct before God or their fellow men? He would have condemned, and they would have despised them.

Methodist preachers frequently, and justly, boast of their high and *broad* commission, to go out into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. They proclaim to mankind, that to this great and glorious

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mission, they have been called of God, and moved by the Holy Ghost. The command to go out into *all the world,* and preach, etc., they must of course, understand to mean, that they shall employ all their time in going *whereever* Providence may open their way, and preach the everlasting gospel to the perishing souls of men. Should they decline an opportunity to do this, simply because the men and women choose to sit together, or prefer to give a liberal support to those appointed to minister to them, would such an excuse relieve them of the guilt of a grievous and fearful wrong in the sight of God, or shield them from the contempt and unmitigated scorn of the liberal and enlightened spirit of the age?

To the positions taken in the foregoing pages, it is frequently objected, that the exceptions contended for, impair the energy and success of Methodism. The reader will please observe, that the relative merits of pews and free seats, are not now under consideration. It is a matter of no consequence to our argument which is the better system. The point in discussion regards simply the fitness and propriety of *making exceptions* to the general method, when and where, in the judgment of the people it may be necessary. That these exceptions have heretofore done us any injury, in any particular, cannot be shown. The progress of the Sunday School cause, the diffusion of missionary zeal, the interests of literature, and the success of all the enterprizes

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of christianity, in those churches and conferences, where these exceptions have been made, have been equal to, if they have not far *surpassed*, the results that have obtained in other portions of our work.

Let us examine a few facts bearing upon the question. Facts in this connection are of immense consequence, and should be viewed with the greatest candor. The pew system, we have seen, is in general use among the Wesleyan Methodists. In all the numerous benevolent and religious enterprizes of the age, the zeal and success of our English brethren far surpass ours. Their efforts in the cause of missions, the education of the poor, and every other good and commendable cause, are truly astonishing. In all these things, they are far in advance of us. And when we contemplate the order, regularity, and efficiency of this church, we do not hesitate to say, that it is the best—the most successful, and judicious arrangement of religious effort on the face of the earth. There is nothing to compare with it in life and energy, either in the old or the new world. It is not designed to make any comparison or allusions, to disparage the zeal and efficiency of American Methodism. Our object is to show, that whatever other injury our brethren of England suffer from the adoption of the pew system, their *benevolence* and moral enterprize are not thereby enfeebled or impaired. The number of their members, including those in foreign missions, as we may gather from their last annual

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minutes, was about four hundred and seventy thousand. They raised for missionary purposes alone, more than five hundred thousand dollars; or over *one dollar for each member*. In round numbers, our membership amounts to six hundred and seventy thousand. Our missionary collections, last year, amounted to nearly one hundred and ten thousand dollars; not quite *sixteen cents* for each member of the church. Their liberality in all other respects, is fully equal to that exhibited in the missionary cause. Despite the pew system, they manifest great care for the oppressed and unfortunate; and do more to relieve the destitute, and promote the happiness and social elevation of the poor, than any other religious body in the world. The support they give to their ministers when in the effective work, or superannuated, bears about the same relation to that given to our ministers and families, as their missionary contributions do to ours. Nor are the English Methodists deficient in spirituality. Their peculiar devoutness in the house of prayer, will enable us to recognize them whereever we may see them. There is a regularity in their mode of life—a uniformity in their religious character, which makes them efficient and eminently useful. The great liberality of the Wesleyans cannot be explained by their *wealth*. We are abundantly more wealthy. But their system of operations is more *energetic*, although encumbered with pews, and hence it accomplishes greater results.

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Let us however contemplate a few facts connected with Methodism in this country. The increase of our membership for the last conference year, as reported in our General Minutes, was nearly *twenty-eight thousand.* In the twenty-nine annual conferences of our church, there are at least *twenty-one* in which the pew system is tolerated, and partially, or generally adopted. The increase in these conferences was about *sixteen thousand.* In the remaining eight conferences, the increase was nearly *twelve thousand.* Several of those last mentioned, are the largest in our church, and are located in a region of country, to which, from those first spoken of, there is, and has been for many years, a constant tide of *emigration.* And no small proportion of their increase may be thus accounted for.

In New England, where pews or "family sittings," are in general use, from the year 1810 to 1820, the population increased *nineteen and one-third,* and Methodism, *ninety-two* per cent. From 1820 to 1830, the population advanced *seventeen and one-half,* and Methodism *ninety-eight and one-half* per cent. From 1830 to 1840, the population increased *fourteen,* and Methodism *eighty-five* per cent. Since that time the numerical strength of Methodism has improved as much in those portions of our work, where the pew system, etc., have been tolerated or adopted, as elsewhere.

Without intending to offend, or make any invidious comparisons, another fact may here be introduced. It

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is this. The increase of Methodism in the capital of New England, within the last fifteen years, has been *four hundred* per cent. greater, than in the city, properly styled, the Queen of the West. We speak of the increase in proportion to the progress of the population. This increase embraces the number of members, building churches, and other items of advance and improvement. The number of probationers admitted into the New England Conference during the past year, was, in proportion to the membership, *seventy-five* per cent greater than in the Ohio Conference.

Another fact deserving notice, is the ease with which our church expenses are met where the pew system is used. Upon examining the annual minutes, the reader will be astonished, to learn how small a congregation will support a minister. Societies, containing not more than forty or fifty members, will sustain a station, and do it well. These facts, all the circumstances taken into the account, warrant the declaration that the success and improvement of Methodism, have been in no wise impaired, by either the partial, or general use of pews.

In the conferences where the pew system is partially or generally used, *thirty per cent.* of the claims of our superannuated preachers, and the widows and children of deceased preachers, were paid last year; in the remainder, only *nineteen per cent.* In the former, the missionary collections amounted to nearly *eighteen cents*

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per member; in the latter, only a little over *thirteen*. In five of the annual conferences, where the pew system is more the general usage of the church, than an exception thereto, the amount collected for missionary purposes averaged about *twenty-seven cents* for each member. The greatest average in other portions of the work, in a similar number of conferences, was about *fourteen cents*. The Genessee Conference paid into our missionary treasury, *thirty;* New York East, *twenty-nine;* Providence, *twenty-seven;* New England, *twenty-seven;* East Genessee, *twenty-four;* North Ohio, *twenty-two;* and the Ohio Conference *twenty-one cents* for each member of the church within their bounds. The reader may rely upon these statistics. They were collected from the "General Minutes;" and upon examination, it is believed, will prove to be correct. However, should there be any doubt, the authority just quoted, can easily be consulted.

This exhibition of facts certainly destroys the force of the objection they are presented to meet. The reader will keep in mind we are not contending for the use of the pew system as the general method of our church. Hence, these facts are not introduced to make converts to what is improperly denominated a *new* order of things; but exclusively for the purpose of answering the objection already mentioned. If it be said that they make it appear, the pew system is the best, the most efficient; we will simply reply, facts are *stubborn*

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things, and their influence is beyond our control. What effect they may have we cannot pause to inquire. Justice to the subject in hand, demanded they should be brought out. We may say further, the success and vitality of Methodism, depend but little upon the pew system, or the free seat system. The former, *when necessary*, is as truly Methodistic and efficient as the latter. The life and power of our economy, unless we have been sadly deceived, are derived from a higher source than either of them. We owe our success to the influence of the Spirit of God upon the hearts and minds of our ministry and membership; inducing the one class to preach the pure word of God, with zeal and simplicity, and the other, to pray in sincerity and faith, that the kingdom of God may come, and over all prevail. In this state of things, whether our people be convened in a dreary barn or a splendid religious edifice, — whether they sit apart or promiscuously, — whether they rent or sell pews with fine cushions, or occupy seats "without backs, and with a long rail separating the men from the women;" indeed, whether they *sit or stand*, will be of but little consequence. The God of salvation will be with us, and smile upon the work of our hands. Glorious success will mark our career, and despite all the murmurings of unbelieving croakers, we shall be led on by the Lord of hosts, to battle and to victory.

As it is not designed to advocate the adoption of the

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pew system or "promiscuous sitting," as the *general policy of the church*, it is not deemed necessary to notice the objections frequently urged against both, farther than may be requisite in the discussion of the propriety of their *occasional use*. Which of these systems may be best suited to any particular locality, is left by the author, to be determined by those whose position gives them a better opportunity to judge. His object has been to show, that by the adoption of either, the discipline of Methodism is not infringed upon, nor is its consistency and unity affected. Except so far as this is concerned, whatever may be his particular views or personal preferences, is of but little consequence to himself or others. Whenever the people may need, or desire any modification of our *general custom*, in reference to these things, the authorities of the church will give due attention to the subject, and take such action as may be necessary. Whether or not the time has come for this, it is not pretended to say. Yet it is as clear as the light of noonday, that the period is upon us, in which the laity of our church will *insist upon the right*, to do in all these matters as they may prefer. This is a right they always have freely exercised, and which until very recently, has never been questioned, but in every way possible, has been sanctioned and approved.

Those of our ministers and people who object to the use of pews, simply because, as they allege, in so doing

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we depart from the *original rule*, should keep in remembrance that the said original rule, not only advised men and women to sit apart, but also prohibited the *use of backs to the seats*. Notwithstanding all their conscientious devotion to *ancient* Methodist law and usage, these persons find no serious objection to splendidly furnished pulpits, or church edifices of the most improved modern style. To be consistent, they should insist upon all the minute details of these regulations, as we have quoted them on a former page.

The arguments and allusions occasionally used in the investigation of this subject, deduced from excited fears of aristocratic pre-eminence, jealousy for the rights and interests of the poor, and devotion to the principles of *old-fashioned Methodism*, need no particular notice. They involve a species of demagogueism and bigoted fanaticism, which will do no great injury, save to the parties driven to the necessity of using them. The employment of such artful methods to attract public favor and gain the support of the multitude, may suit a brawling and crafty politician; but in a subject of the character of that which we have just considered, and among ministers of the gospel of Christ, they are highly improper, and in exceedingly bad taste.

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CHAPTER VII.

EPISCOPACY.

Various grades of ministry—Episcopacy—Not a superior order—A mere office—Scripture argument—Testimony of the fathers—Appointing power safely lodged with the episcopacy—Should be independent, but responsible.

THE ministry of the Methodist Episcopal Church is composed of bishops, elders, and deacons. The bishops are not a distinct or superior *order*, and are above elders only in *office*. It is true, the form and ceremony of their ordination, might be so construed as to lead to the supposition, that they are considered a third, or higher ministerial order. In the opening prayer of this service, the following language is used: "Almighty God, giver of all good things, who by thy Holy Spirit hast appointed divers *orders* of ministers in thy church, mercifully behold this thy servant, now called to the work and *ministry* of a bishop." Then, again, as the elected person kneels, the bishops and elders lay their hands on his head, and the officiating bishop says: "Receive the Holy Ghost, for the office and work of a bishop in the church of God, now committed unto thee by the imposition of our hands, in the name of the

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Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." These, and other similar passages which occur in the ceremony, unless carefully explained, would seem to teach that our episcopacy is considered among us a separate and higher ministerial order. The doctrine of Mr. Wesley, however, and our church, from the beginning has been, that bishops and elders, or presbyters, are one and the same *ministerial order*, and the bishopric is merely a superior *office*.

This view is not, as just intimated, novel or merely presumptive, but long established and abundantly corroborated, both by scripture and the testimony of the fathers. And we may add, it is a question which has been thoroughly discussed. A critical and labored examination of all its relations and bearings, has been made by the most distinguished theological writers of the age. Hence, we will not be expected to introduce any additional facts or arguments — any thing more clear and conclusive, than that already accessible to the reader. All that we aim to do, is to glance at the subject, and induce the careful study of more extended theories, than would comport with the design of the present volume. If we accomplish this, our purpose is served. Hence, we ask a candid and patient perusal of the following observations. They are concise, and we hope to the point.

The word bishop occurs five times in the New Testament; and in every instance is so used, as necessarily

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to be understood as synonymous with *presbyter*. Presbyter and bishop, as will be shown, are convertible terms, and applied indiscriminately to the *same persons*. In Acts xx, 17, it is said that St. Paul, "from Miletus sent to Ephesus, and called the *elders* of the church." After speaking of his labors and doctrine, and the evil that might befall him at Jerusalem; and assuring them that he was free from the blood of all men, because he had not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God, he says: "Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you *overseers*, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." The word here translated "overseers," in the original, is precisely the same as that which elsewhere is rendered "bishop." It is therefore evident, that the same persons, who in the seventeenth verse, by St. Luke, are denominated elders, are here, by St. Paul, called "overseers," or "*bishops*." Both of these men were inspired, and hence, both were free from error. And yet, beyond all controversy, they applied both of the titles named, to the same persons.

The salutation of the epistle to the Philippians, is addressed "to all the saints in Christ Jesus, which are at Philippi, with the *bishops* and *deacons*." If there were three orders in the christian ministry, how came the apostle here to mention but *two* — the highest and lowest? If it be insisted that he meant by the term

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bishops, all that is contended for by those who entertain opinions which conflict with ours, then the passage proves too much to serve their purpose. The term is used in the *plural*. And this one fact is fatal to their theory. There could, in their sense and understanding of the term, be but *one* bishop of the church at Philippi. There might, however, be many elders.

Chrysostom, early in the fifth century, in commenting upon this passage, says: "How is this? Were there many bishops in the same city? By no means. But he calls the *presbyters* by this name; for at that time, this was the *common appellation of both*." It is also said, that the celebrated Polycarp, about the year 140, sent an epistle to this very church, in which he exhorted them "to be subject to the *presbyters* and *deacons*." St. Paul names the *bishops* and deacons; and Polycarp, the *presbyters* and deacons. This circumstance can be explained, or accounted for, only by understanding the terms as *synonymous*, and applied in common to the same persons.

In the epistle to Titus i, 5–7, the following passage occurs: "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldst set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain *elders* in every city as I had appointed there; if any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children, not accused of riot, or unruly. For a *bishop* must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no

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striker, not given to filthy lucre," etc. The language of the apostle here, is without force or propriety, unless we understand the term elders and bishops to apply to the *same persons*. He apprises Titus that he left him in Crete to ordain *elders* in every city, and points out to him the qualifications necessary for the office. And as an inducement to vigilance in this particular, he says a *bishop* must be blameless, etc. There would be neither good sense or suitableness in the passage, upon any other supposition, than that St. Paul referred to the same persons, in both instances in which the terms are used.

In the third chapter of the first epistle to Timothy, St. Paul describes in order, first, the character of a bishop, and then that of a deacon. If there had been another class, between bishops and deacons, the apostle certainly would have mentioned it here. In a former part of the epistle he speaks of the *presbytery*, and subsequently adverts to the *elders*, or presbyters who rule well. It is hence concluded, there were originally but two ministerial orders; one being called indiscriminately elders, presbyters and bishops; the other designated *deacons*.

Our Lord, in the first epistle of Peter, ii, 25, is called the *Shepherd* and *Bishop* of our souls. He is the Great Shepherd of the flock, and provides for their support and security. He also is the Bishop of our souls; the supreme *Overseer* of the church. To Him only is

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the title in this sense to be applied. It is blasphemous to apply it thus, to any mere man.

The apostle says, in this same epistle: "The elders which are among you I exhort, *who also am an elder*. Feed the flock of Christ which is among you; *taking the oversight* thereof," etc; that is, fulfill the duties of overseers or bishops. The apostle calls himself an *elder;* and those whom he exhorts to perform the work of *bishops*, he styles *elders*. The inference is perfectly plain and natural, that the apostle designates himself and his brethren, bishops and elders, or presbyters, at pleasure. The term rendered bishop, is derived from the Greek language. Presbyter is of Jewish origin. Hence the apostles, when addressing Jewish christians, used the latter; and when writing to Gentile converts, they employed the former.

If, as many contend, there be more than *two* orders in the christian ministry, then the scriptures are by no means a safe and infallible guide to truth. A mind unbiassed by prejudice, and open to conviction, could receive no other impression, from the *uniform* language of holy writ, than that the apostles understood and taught, that elders or presbyters, in respect to ministerial order, were equal with bishops. Upon any other hypothesis, the scriptures are calculated to mislead and deceive us.

A writer of some celebrity, sums up the scripture argument upon this topic, in the following able and

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conclusive manner: "That the terms *bishop* and *presbyter*, in their application to the first class of officers, are perfectly convertible, the one pointing out the very same class of rulers with the other, is as evident as the sun shining in his strength. Timothy was instructed by the apostle Paul in the qualities which were to be required in those who desired the office of a *bishop*. Paul and Barnabas ordained *presbyters* in every church they had founded. Titus is directed to ordain in every city *presbyters*, who are to be blameless; the husband of one wife. And the reason of so strict a scrutiny into character is thus ordered; for a *bishop* must be blameless. If this does not identify the bishop with the presbyter, in the name of common sense what can do it? Suppose a law, pointing out the qualifications of a sheriff, were to say — A *sheriff* must be a man of pure character, of great activity, and resolute spirit; for it is highly necessary that a *governor* be of unspotted reputation, etc., the bench and bar would be rather puzzled for a construction, and would be compelled to conclude, either that something had been left out in transcribing the law, or that governor and sheriff meant the *same sort of an officer;* or, that their honors of the legislature, had taken leave of their wits. The case is not a whit stronger than the case of presbyter and bishop in the epistle to Titus. Again, Paul, when on his last journey to Jerusalem, sends for the *presbyters* of Ephesus to meet him at

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Miletus, and there enjoins these *presbyters* to feed the church of God, over which the Holy Ghost had made them *bishops*. It appears, then, that the *bishops* to whom Paul refers in his instructions to Timothy, were neither more nor less than plain *presbyters*. To a man who has no turn to serve, no interest in perverting the obvious meaning of words, one would think that a mathematical demonstration could not carry more satisfactory evidence."

An abundance of proof to sustain our position might be adduced from the "fathers." Volumes of the most clear and decisive testimony, might be gathered from this source. But this is not necessary; the word of God is the final arbiter in all questions of this character. Here is the *only* and sufficient rule of our faith. To this we have appealed; and by it, we are willing to stand or fall.

However superfluous it may appear, in view of the position just stated, we solicit the reader's attention to the following testimonials; commencing with Clement of the first century, who wrote an epistle of rather extraordinary note, to the Corinthians. In this epistle he mentions but *two* orders in the ministry. He says: "the apostles, preaching in countries and cities, appointed the first fruits of their labors to be bishops and deacons, having proved them by his Spirit." He then goes on to say, "it were a grievous sin to reject those who have faithfully fulfilled the duties of their *episcopal*

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office;" and adds immediately, "blessed are those *presbyters* who have finished their course, and entered upon their reward." An eminent Episcopalian says: "Clement himself was not even aware of the distinction between bishops and presbyters—which in fact he uses as synonymous."

The testimony of Polycarp, of the second century, has already been given. Justin Martyr, his cotemporary, in speaking of the modes of worship in the first churches, names but *two orders* of ministers. To these might be added page after page. But it is not necessary. To do this, might exhaust the reader's patience; and could be of no essential service, in as plain and practical an inquiry, as that which we design.

According to numerous authorities, the title of *bishop*, began to be exclusively appropriated to the presbyter or elder, who presided in the consultations, or meetings of the presbyters of each church, some time during the second century. Jerome of the fifth century, speaks of this in the following significant language: "A presbyter, therefore, is the *same as a bishop;* and, before there were, by the *instigation of the devil*, parties in religion, and it was said among different people, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, the churches were governed by the *joint counsel of presbyters*. But afterward, when every one accounted those whom he baptized, as belonging to himself and not to Christ, it was decreed throughout the world, that one

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chosen from among the presbyters, should be put over the rest, and the whole care of the church should be committed to him, and the seeds of schism to be taken away." Nor was the opinion we advocate contradicted until late in the sixteenth century. This is a remarkable and well-authenticated fact.

But notwithstanding, as already intimated, we can give no countenance to those views of episcopal pre-eminence, which create a *third* ministerial order in the church, superior to deacons and elders, we must insist that our bishops, are in the true apostolic succession, and are elevated to their office, without any violation of scripture precept and example, and in accordance with the usages of the primitive church.

We are aware that the office of *apostleship*, was, in many respects, peculiar; and those who filled it, properly speaking, have had *no successors*. The apostles were inspired by the Holy Ghost, and appointed to the special work of completing the canon of scripture. They had absolute authority to establish and superintend the church, appoint pastors, excommunicate offenders, and determine, infallibly, all matters in controversy, respecting either doctrine or discipline. They also, for the confirmation of their doctrine and authority, were favored with the power of working miracles. In these respects, they can have no successors.

But, if, as some contend, there be such a thing as a

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regular succession of *ministers*, from the apostles down through each subsequent age and century, what would it avail? The ministry connected with such a succession, would not, in preaching the word and administering the sacraments, confer grace upon the receivers, without the aid of the Holy Spirit. Judas received from the hands of our Lord himself the consecrated emblems; and Simon was baptized by apostolic hands. Both were hypocrites and traitors of the deepest hue.

Still, there is a sense in which there is a regular succession in the christian ministry, from the apostles down to those, who now preach Christ by the authority and sanction of Heaven. A true successor of the apostles, is one who teaches the doctrines they taught, and is "called of God and moved by the Holy Ghost to preach the word." And every minister of the Lord Jesus Christ, whatever may be his name or office in the church, who has been converted and baptized from on high, and goes forth with a "single eye" to the glory of God, to save sinners, is in the *true succession;* and may be called a genuine apostolical minister. How fully the eminent and godly men, who at present fill the episcopal office among us, answer to this description, their works and labors of love abundantly testify. They have in abundance, *seals* to their ministry, and their epistles, may be "known and read of all men." We should be truly grateful, that since the organization of our church, this office has never yet been

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reproached or dishonored by an unfaithful incumbent. Our bishops have been men of great moral worth, and in every respect, have proven themselves worthy the confidence reposed in them. But we must not enlarge here. Our business is rather to speak of the *office*, and not of the men who fill it.

A bishop is constituted properly by the election of the General Conference. The question is asked in our discipline, "How is a bishop to be constituted? Ans. By the election of the General Conference, and the laying on of the hands of three bishops, or at least one bishop and two elders." Again, it is asked, "If by death, expulsion, or otherwise, there be no bishop remaining in our church, what shall we do? Ans. The General Conference shall elect a bishop; and the elders, or any three of them, who shall be appointed by the General Conference for that purpose, shall ordain him according to our form of ordination." The episcopacy, therefore, to all intents and purposes, is constituted, or created by the General Conference. The ordination service, is a mere formal recognition, or proclamation of the fact, that the person concerned, by his brethren and fellow-laborers, has been promoted to the honorable and responsible office of a bishop.

Formerly the powers of the Methodist episcopacy were much greater than at the present time. Beside, the authority now vested in them, they received and decided appeals from the preachers and the people.

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No person could be ordained bishop, elder, or deacon without their consent; except in case of death, expulsion, or otherwise, there should be no bishop in the connexion. No preacher was permitted to publish a book, without episcopal consent and approbation. These important prerogatives were at different periods, wisely transferred to the General, annual, and quarterly conferences.

The duties of the episcopacy are to preside in our conferences; with certain restriction, fix the appointments of the preachers; in the intervals of the annual conferences, change, receive, and suspend preachers as necessity may require, and the discipline directs; to travel at large through the connexion; oversee the spiritual and temporal business of the church; ordain bishops, elders and deacons; decide questions of law; point out a course of reading and study, to be pursued by candidates for the ministry, etc., etc. Although the bishop decides all questions of law in annual conferences, his decision may be appealed from to the General Conference. The *application* of the law is with the conference. A bishop has no vote in either the quarterly, annual, or General Conferences. He is amenable to the General Conference, who may expel him, not only for immorality, but also for *improper conduct.* Improper conduct, as spoken of in our discipline, is understood to mean a small offense below a crime. In cases of immorality, the discipline directs the course

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to be adopted with the offender. It differs from that enjoined with reference to our members and preachers, in being more summary and rigorous.

The power of appointing the preachers was originally exercised by Mr. Wesley. His peculiar position as the *father* of the whole family, gave him, in many respects, absolute authority. This, however, he could not, of course, transfer to another. Hence, in the matter of making the appointments for the preachers in our church, as well as in all other respects, he directed that our bishops should be responsible to the Conference. If, therefore, the bishops should oppress or "lord it over God's heritage," under the general charge of "improper conduct," they can be held to account, and punished as their offense may deserve.

The appointing power is *necessarily* vested in the episcopacy. This necessity grows out of our *itinerancy*. In view of the numerous and marked advantages of this feature of our economy, the people have yielded their right to choose their minister, and the ministry have surrendered the right to select their congregation or field of labor. The latter must *go where they* are sent, and the former *receive those* appointed to serve them. In this arrangement, which of the parties make the greatest sacrifice? We answer, beyond all controversy, the *ministry*. Great as some may deem the sacrifice made on the part of the people, it is trifling, compared with that made by the ministry.

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The appointing power must of necessity be lodged some where. And where could it be so safely vested as in the *episcopacy?* It could not, without serious difficulty, be exercised by a committee of the clergy, or of the laity, or of both combined. The episcopal office, by the constitutional provisions of our government, is placed beyond the reach of any improper influence from either the laity or the ministry. Hence, the bishops, in the legitimate exercise of their prerogative, are equally interested to promote the welfare and prosperity of both. No local preference, or personal feeling, can control their action, unless indeed they should be the vilest and worst of men. There is no temptation to oppress either the men who labor, or those on whom their labors are bestowed. In either case, they could gain nothing but censure, ill will, and distrust; whereas, it is as necessary to their personal *enjoyment* as to their official success, to have the confidence and co-operation of both.

But we have said the appointing power is *necessarily* vested in the *episcopacy*. It would be impossible to keep up the itinerancy, if the preachers were permitted to make or choose their own appointments. Several preachers might select the *same place*. This most certainly would be the result. Nor would it answer for the people to select their minister. Many congregations might request the services of the *same man*. This, of course, would be the case with all the most inviting

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and desirable fields of labor, and the more popular and talented of our preachers. The following views are substantially correct:

"Such are the tendencies of human nature, that the largest societies would be disposed to choose the most popular men, and the more popular preachers would be likely to reciprocate the disposition. The wealthier would thus keep always the best preachers, and the gifts of the ministry would not be distributed. One important advantage of the itinerancy would hereby be lost.

The less able preachers, kept by the above course in the feeble appointments, would sooner or later be starved out, or compelled to retire to their work-shops and ploughs, and a large portion of our work be abandoned. This is a result that we can hardly now avoid. The least relaxation would render it uncontrollable, and thus, as we have said, one-third of our appointments soon be destroyed, and much of our moral energy gone. We soberly believe that this result would ensue in a very few years after such an arrangement of the appointing power.

Many societies would be liable to choose the same man, and many men the same place; who shall then decide? And if even there could be devised a mode of determining such cases, yet if the *itinerancy* is to be maintained in *fact* and not merely in name; if these changes are to be as frequent and as extensive as they

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now are, what a scene of negotiation, strife, and disappointment must be kindled every year or two in the societies? Would not these inevitable consequences more than counterbalance the advantages of such an abortive itinerancy? Would it not be better to turn Congregationalist entirely, and at once?"

In such a position of affairs, it is evident, some person or persons must have authority to make the appointments, or all the endless and perplexing confusion just alluded to must ensue. And who could be selected for this work, so well prepared to protect the interests involved, and render justice to all the parties concerned, as those men who, because of the nature and circumstances of their official trust, must almost of necessity be guided by *proper motives*, in determining the various questions committed to their charge.

The episcopal prerogative, we would also observe, is designed to be a *conservative* agency, protecting alike the ministry and the membership; and hence, it is placed beyond the control of either. Neither party can consistently, with the spirit of the Methodist discipline, in any way interfere with, or embarrass the episcopacy. Except in a constitutional manner, even the General Conference may not make inquiry, or call it to account, in this particular. Hence, the episcopacy, although not an *irresponsible*, is an independent part of our system. It was doubtless this view of the subject, that induced the passage of the following pre-

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amble and resolution at the last General Conference: "Whereas, in some instance, or instances, annual conferences have advised our bishops not to appoint the same person to the office of *presiding elder* for two terms in succession, and have also advised them not to reappoint any one to that office, who has served two terms therein; and whereas, *such advice* is regarded as an *unsuitable interference* with the duties and responsibilities of the episcopacy; therefore, resolved, That it is the sense of this conference that our bishops should not be restrained or embarrassed by *any such advice* on the part of an annual conference." It is clear, from the construction and phraseology of the foregoing preamble and resolutions, that the highest ecclesiastical body of our church, disapprove any and all interference with the episcopacy, even by an annual conference, save in those cases where the discipline provides for conference action. No resolutions of an annual conference, therefore, can *legally* restrain, or direct the episcopacy. In certain cases, referred to in the discipline, the authority of the bishops to make *special* appointments, is based upon the recommendation of an annual conference. The fact that such exceptions are named, the genius and spirit of our institutions, the action of the General Conference just quoted, and the usage of the church in all her past history, make it clearly appear, that an annual conference has no right, in any way, to restrain, direct,

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control, or embarrass the episcopacy in their appropriate work of fixing the appointments of the preachers. And an attempt to do anything of the sort, directly or indirectly, should be discountenanced, and resisted promptly, and with the greatest energy, as a measure fraught with the most disastrous tendencies. If an annual conference may do that which is here condemned, the laity also may pass resolutions, instructing and advising the bishops in various matters connected with their administration. And, in such a case, it would not only be their privilege, but likewise their *duty*, so to do. Whenever the episcopacy shall become accessible to influences from this source, the people should insist upon participating in its control.

However, it will be a sad and unpropitious event in our history, when any interference with the episcopacy, of a formal character, emanating either from the preachers or the people, shall be tolerated or regarded by them. Nothing scarcely they could do, would so certainly shake the confidence of the church in the propriety and fitness, or security of their official trust.

The department of our government now under consideration, to retain its integrity and efficiency, and render general satisfaction to preachers and people, must be free from all such unconstitutional influences. The work of making the appointments, must be under the exclusive management and direction of the bishops. Even the *advisory* counsels of the body of the pre-

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siding elders, commonly designated the *cabinet*, cannot come between them and the people, without exciting wide-spread disapprobation and strife. The people, it is believed, are entirely willing to confide all these matters to the bishops; provided these venerable men are permitted to act in reference to them, according to their own judgment, and with reference to the *law* and *usage* of the church.

The great majority of the preachers, also, are equally true in their devotion to this feature of our economy. A large share of the dissatisfaction among us, in reference to appointments, arises, not so much from the difficulties and privations of the work, but from the fact, that an *irresponsible agency* is sometimes suspected of an unfair, or perhaps it would be better and more becoming to say, *unconstitutional* interference with the stationing authority. This interference however is unfair, *because* it is unconstitutional. There is no principle, revealed or methodistic, by which it can be sustained. Hence, the parties affected and injured by its use, may complain, and should denounce it.

To make this part of our system work with harmony and comparative ease, all that is necessary, is to produce the conviction, that the *bishop* has made the appointments without any influence or control of the character just named. Then, however great the sacrifice involved, all will be *satisfied*, if not delighted. The preachers persuaded that the general interests of

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the work have been consulted, notwithstanding, in some instances, their fields of labor may not be the most inviting and pleasant, will cheerfully, and in hope of God's blessing, prosecute their toil, and earn a rich reward. The people assured that their wants have received due consideration, and their wishes have been gratified, so far as could be the case, with an *itinerant* ministry, will receive those sent to them as messengers from Heaven. And in this manner, our operations will progress with harmony and success; otherwise, murmuring and distrust must ensue.

The reproaches of our adversaries concerning the dangerous and tyrannical powers entrusted to our episcopacy, it may, in conclusion, be added, cannot be sustained by appealing either to the legal or constitutional provisions by which it is recognized, or the practical developments of the system. The former abounds in the most judicious and effective checks and restraints; the latter, save in the exceptions intimated, furnishes a multitude of facts to relieve this feature of our institutions, of all the insinuations and aspersions heaped upon it, by suspicious and designing men.

It cannot, of course, be denied, that occasionally our bishops have been led astray by crafty and unworthy advisers. Being men as liable to err as others, they may be deceived, and incorrectly judge the talents and qualifications of their brethren, and the condition and necessities of the places to which they are sent. Hence,

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there have been a few instances, in which both the people and the preachers have been aggrieved, and have had just ground for dissatisfaction and complaint. Yet, even in cases of this character, where the true design and intent of our disciplinary regulations upon these points, have been kept in view, there has been but little more than a temporary exhibition of unpleasant feeling. The excitement has been but momentary, and matters have soon assumed their ordinary position.

Our chief difficulty in relation to the episcopacy, is not that it has too much or too little power, but occasionally it has been overawed in its operations, and deprived of that independence with which it is invested by the discipline. In such a state of things, the office may be esteemed a dangerous source of oppression to all concerned. If we cannot have an *independent* episcopacy, it would be infinitely better to have none.

The office of a bishop has recently excited much attention. Various modifications have been suggested. To us, however, it seems no material change is necessary, provided it be freed from all the incumbrances at which we have hinted. Hence we are inclined to the opinion that the episcopacy, *as constituted and guarded by the discipline*, is sufficiently vigorous and entirely secure. It needs, if properly understood, and permitted to carry out its legitimate functions, no further restrictions or additional powers. However should the event already deplored, come to pass, it is *impossible* to tell

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what will be needed, or what will be done. No one can anticipate to what extent, in that case, the demand for retrenchment and reform may be carried. The great mass of the people and the preachers, feeling their wrongs and beholding their danger, from a position in which they cannot be resisted, will demand redress. And very probably, infatuated with the idea of progress and novelty, their efforts to improve and abolish, will not cease, until every peculiarity of our system has been annihilated.

With great deference to the judgment of "older and wiser heads," we would suggest, that the episcopal office should be filled by men who have learned from experience, the difficulties and privations of an itinerant life. They who know nothing of these, may express surprise, that men professing to be called of God to the work of the ministry, should in any case complain of ill fare, hard usage, or grievous toil. There is something splendid in the *theory* that men are ready to remove annually with large and expensive families hundreds of miles, and endure the sufferings of a homeless wanderer's life, to preach Christ and offer salvation to the world. But when reduced to practice, it will be found a method of labor by no means as desirable, as many at a casual glance suppose. The enthusiasm of youth, and the piety of riper years, while "*distance* lends enchantment to the view," may behold in the work of an itinerant minister much of

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interest and excitement. It certainly is a sublime instance of the hallowing effects of revealed religion upon the selfishness of the human heart, that a man gives himself up wholly to such a work, and make the sacrifices it involves for the good of his fellow men.

But it must not be supposed that those engaged in this work, never become *weary*—that they who make these sacrifices, *feel no pain;* or in other words, it must be kept in mind that a traveling Methodist preacher is a *man.* When enfeebled or exhausted, discouraged or dismayed, aggrieved or overwhelmed, he needs consolation, support, sympathy, and relief. In many respects, no one can become thoroughly acquainted with these things, except by active personal efforts in the field. To be understood, they must be performed and endured, as well as studied and observed.

Perhaps it will be said, and truthfully too, that a minister's reward is in heaven. This, we would reply, may also be said of every good man. Nevertheless, his *work* is on *earth.* Hence, we speak of what he is, and what he does here. In this aspect of the question, there certainly is some propriety and suitableness in the suggestion we have made.

The right which we have surrendered to the episcopacy, is one of great importance and magnitude. And that they may comprehend the nature of the trust committed to their care, and *feel* for those whose work

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they appoint, it is necessary that they themselves should know what it is to go out into the "highways and hedges," and bear all the grievous burdens of the regular work. For the want of this practical knowledge, it is very easy to chide and admonish those who give the slightest indications of dissatisfaction with the lot assigned them. Abstract views of duty, uninfluenced by a familiar acquaintance with the circumstances in which its requisitions must be met, will always lead us astray. Hence, we deem it important, that those elevated to the responsible office of a bishop in our church, should know the nature and bearings of the system, which gives them authority to *command*, and makes it the duty of their brethren to *obey*. They should understand how to serve at the post of *submission*, as well as to direct and govern from the *place of power*. They should know what it is to *go*, as well as how to *send*. This, it seems to us, is necessary, for a judicious and equitable exercise of the powers with which they are intrusted.

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CHAPTER VIII.

PRESIDING ELDERS.

Origin of the office—Of great utility—Want of confidence therein—Causes of dissatisfaction—Reasons for making the office elective—Proposition to abolish the office considered—General reflections.

ANOTHER, and very important office in our system of government, is the *presiding eldership*. All the elders in our church were originally presiding elders. In the "bishops' notes," appended to the discipline, published in 1796, the origin of this office, and the reasons for its institution, are thus explained: "Mr. Wesley informs us in his works, that the whole plan of Methodism was introduced, step by step, by the interference and openings of Providence. This was the case in the present instance. When Mr. Wesley drew up a plan of government for our church in America, he desired that no more elders should be ordained in the first instance than were absolutely necessary, and that the work on the continent should be divided between them, in respect to the duties of their office. The General Conference accordingly elected twelve elders for the above purposes. Bishop Asbury, and the district conferences, afterward found that this order of men was so necessary, that they agreed to enlarge the number, and give

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them the name by which they are at present called, and which is perfectly scriptural, though not the word used in our translation; and this proceeding afterward received the approbation of Mr. Wesley.

In 1792, the General Conference, equally conscious of the necessity of having such an office among us, not only confirmed every thing that bishop Asbury and the district conferences had done, but also drew up, or agreed to the present section for the explanation of the nature and duties of the office. The conference clearly saw that the bishops wanted assistants; that it was impossible that one or two bishops, so to superintend the vast work on this continent, as to keep every thing in order in the intervals of the conference, without other official men to act under them and assist them. And as these would only be the agents of the bishops in every respect, the authority of appointing them, and of changing them, ought, from the nature of things, to be in the episcopacy. If the presiding or ruling elders were not men in whom the bishops could fully confide, or, on the loss of confidence, could exchange for others, the utmost confusion would ensue. This also renders the authority invested in the bishops of fixing the extent of each district, highly expedient. They must be supposed to be the best judges of the abilities of the presiding elders whom they themselves choose. And it is a grand part of their duty to make the districts and the talents of the presiding elders who act for them, suit

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and agree with each other, as far as possible. For it cannot be expected, that a sufficient number of them can at any time be found, of equal talents, and therefore, the extent of their field of action must be proportioned to their gifts."

The presiding elders are chosen, stationed, and changed by the bishops. They are not permitted to remain on the same district for more than four years. After serving the usual term, they cannot be returned to the same district for six years. It is their duty to travel and preach through their appointed field of labor. In the absence of the bishop they take charge of all the elders, deacons, preachers, and exhorters in their districts. During the intervals of the annual conference they change, receive, and suspend preachers, as the state of the work demands, and the discipline directs.

In case no bishop be in attendance at an annual conference, they may be appointed by letter from the bishop, or elected by the conference, to preside, etc. They have the general oversight of the spiritual and temporal business of the church. They decide all questions of law before a quarterly meeting conference. But their decision may be appealed from to the president of the ensuing annual conference. They call together all the official members of a circuit or station, and preside in the quarterly conferences. They are also required to give all the information they can, by

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letter or otherwise, to the bishop, concerning the state of the work in the territory committed to their supervision and care.

The office has doubtless been one of great utility. The presiding elder, as he makes his quarterly visitations among the people, has a fine opportunity to encourage his ministerial brethren in their work, confirm the faith of the church, and correct any irregularities of conduct that may be found in his district. His counsel in the administration of discipline, and the exposition of error and false doctrine, may be of incalculable service to preachers and people. By constantly traveling through his district, and having frequent and confidential intercourse with the ministry and membership of the church, he is prepared to inform the bishops of the talents and usefulness of the former, and the wants and preferences of the latter. Thus the office may become a useful and important auxiliary in the work in which we are engaged.

Rev. Abel Stevens, in treating of this office, makes the remarks that follow: "The presiding eldership is a *combination of the most effective official functions*. Its incumbent is a traveling evangelist, and travels on the largest definite scale. His preaching among the churches of his district is not casual, or by sufferance, but regular and authoritative, an official duty. What, now, we ask, might not be the achievements of a mighty man of God in such a sphere? How might he

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go from church to church sounding the evangelic trumpet, advocating the great interests of the age, and leading on the subordinate ministry from victory to victory! Assuredly, if such a function is not useful, the fault must be more in the officer than in the office.

Further: he has official oversight 'of all the elders and deacons, traveling and local preachers, and exhorters' on his district, to give them counsel respecting their ministerial conduct, direct their studies and labors, reprove their faults, and adjust their differences. Assuredly, a man of capacity and energy may find here an enviable field of usefulness; his district may be a line of battle, whose whole movement is at his command. How many recruits may he rally into the ministerial corps! how may he impress the apostolic character on the youthful evangelists under his guidance! how cheer them in the hour of despondence, inspirit them in the day of declension or indolence, and guard them in the time of excitement and revival! Such an office might certainly befit an apostle.

Again: he has charge of the administration of discipline throughout his district. He is 'to take care that every part of our discipline be enforced.' He is to preside at the trials of local preachers, and in the court of appeals. His office supposes him thoroughly acquainted with the discipline of the church; many of the preachers on stations and circuits may, from their youth or habits, be deficient in this important knowl-

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edge. A defect in the administration of discipline, especially in cases of trial or dispute among brethren, may devastate a whole church. How important, then, is that office which extends its supervision over all such cases, which presents at the altar of every church, in cases of exigency, the mature experience and skill of sanctified age, to advise and moderate parties, or, if need be, adjudicate their appeals! How much discord and ruin may it not prevent!

'By keeping,' says a venerable authority, 'a watchful eye over all the traveling and local preachers in the district, administering advice and admonition as occasion may require, a presiding elder may restrain irregularities in their early stages; correct small offenses before they ripen into evils which would disgrace the church, and injure the cause; and thereby prevent many of the charges and trials which otherwise would fall upon individuals to their injury, if not their ultimate ruin.'

But still further: he presides in the quarterly conferences, and thus has a periodical examination of all the financial and other interests of the charge. Its official management, its fiscal difficulties, its pastor, local preachers, exhorters, class-leaders, and stewards, its past success, and its means for the future, all come under his review and influence on these occasions. Not only at these regular periods, but at all times and places on his district, can he officially interpose for the

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welfare of the church. Does a difficulty arise between the preacher and people? The presiding elder steps in to remove it. Does a schism occur, threatening the quiet or the existence of the church? He is the official mediator between the parties. Does the pastor fail in health or apostatize? He provides a substitute. Does a difficult case of discipline occur? He comes as adviser or judge of appeals. Is a new church projected? He counsels in regard to its execution, its deed and its means. Do young men of talent appear to be called to the ministry of the word? He examines them, directs their preparation, and assigns them fields. Is not this a sphere for the largest ability and usefulness? And when it is considered that a great proportion of our ministry is composed of young men, and that it receives little, if any, training before the period of actual service, such an official oversight becomes doubly important.

The presiding eldership is a necessary auxiliary to the episcopacy in making the annual appointments. This is its highest necessity. We have shown the impossibility of a successful itinerancy based on annual negotiations between preachers and people, and its equal impossibility in the hands of a committee of both. A committee specially devoted to the inspection of the ministry and the churches, traveling among them to ascertain their capabilities and necessities, is the only secure mode of managing this critical machinery. Such

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a committee are our bishops and presiding elders. The people, especially, should uphold the office as essential to their interests in the arrangement of the appointments. How could the bishops possibly make these appointments with proper discrimination, unaided by such helps? The former are few in number, and travel through the whole nation; how can they know the qualifications of all the preachers, the circumstances of their families, and the wants of all the churches?"

Notwithstanding, however, the office, in regard to utility and efficiency, may be all, and abundantly more than we have represented, it cannot be denied that our preachers and people, do not confide therein as they did in former years. It may be esteemed treasonable and hazardous to intimate anything of the kind; but it is true we have imbibed the idea, that the presiding eldership, is an instrument by which a system of favoritism is fostered, and crafty and improper influences are brought to bear upon the stationing authorities of the church. That such views are frequently unfounded suspicions, and without any warrant from the facts in the case, will be cheerfully admitted. Nevertheless, we cannot but perceive, that the office is by no means of as good report among us, as in times gone by. Its utility is becoming a question of serious doubt with many. Various reasons may be assigned for this. The chief source of difficulty, however, will be found in the fact, that by custom, it has been placed in a false, or anti-methodistic position.

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The presiding elders of an annual conference bring forward all candidates for admission into the traveling connexion, and for deacon's or elder's orders. They constitute what is designated the bishop's *cabinet;* and frequently direct or control the entire business of the conference. To some extent this may be necessary. The presiding elder, is, in many respects, better prepared than any one else to present and recommend suitable persons for the itinerancy, etc. From his opportunities of knowing and observing the character and abilities of those under his immediate supervision, he will be likely to make a selection of laborers who will be useful and efficient helpers. And being familiar with the condition of the church within the bounds of his district, his judgment upon all questions connected therewith, should be freely given. Still, the controlling influence the elders exert, has a tendency to excite the jealousy of their brethren, who, in the present state of things, often seem to have but little to do at an annual conference, save to receive their appointments.

The extent of our work, also, has become so great, that our bishops most certainly need advice and counsel, in making out the appointments. And who among the officers of the church could be selected, more suitable to give this advice, than the presiding elders? That they may be correctly informed, and act understandingly, and distribute the workmen so as to make the best use of their talents, the bishops must be in

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communication with the elders. And this communication, of course, should be strictly confidential. The bishops know to but a limited extent either the talents and qualifications of the men to be stationed, or the wants and condition of the places to which they are to be appointed. It is hence apparent, from the circumstances and necessity of the case, the office is very little inferior to the episcopacy itself.

From various causes, and in a manner not necessary to mention here, the presiding eldership has, in a great measure, become the appointing power of the church. This, it is imagined, is a position, it never was designed to occupy; and which, in view of the disciplinary provisions creating the office, as we have already stated, is false and anti-methodistic. It is true, the bishops, in a certain sense, make, or rather we should say, *recognize*, and afterward announce the appointments. But they are made under the direction of the eldership. This is done, as before stated, of necessity.

It is in this way that an *irresponsible agency* necessarily directs and manages our whole itinerant system. It is designated an *irresponsible* agency, because the parties, whose interests are most seriously affected thereby, cannot participate in its creation or control. The bishops are *elected* to their office. By the suffrages of their brethren they are intrusted with authority to say to any and every man in the itinerancy, "go; and he goeth." In their elevation to this

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eminent post, by our delegates, or representatives in the General Conference, we have all participated. Moreover, they are accountable to us, or at least, which is the same thing, to the General Conference. Their official administration is carefully and impartially examined, and commended or disapproved by this body, who when convened, appoint a judicious committee for the express purpose of conducting a rigid and impartial inquiry into the character and bearing of their official acts. Indeed, it may be said, the office itself, as well as the conduct of those who fill it, is under their control. Hence, at their pleasure, whenever it may be deemed advisable, the one may be modified, and the others removed.

The presiding elders are chosen by the bishops. And, however unacceptable, the persons thus chosen, may be, to those whose situation in life and ministerial labors they appoint and direct, they have no authority to displace them. Their official action may be altogether erroneous and unsatisfactory; they may be chargeable with the most flagrant and oppressive favoritism; and yet the parties oppressed, have no power to remove them from office. If guilty of an offense meriting suspension or expulsion, of course they may be dealt with as other offenders. The presiding elders, we are aware, are, in the same sense as other ministers, responsible to the annual conferences of which they are members. In case of immorality or

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positive mal-administration, they may be arraigned and tried as other members of the conference. But the *presiding eldership* is not thus responsible. We do not go so far as even to appoint a committee, or make any inquiry on the subject, further than it may be presented in the examination of the personal, or ministerial character proper, of these brethren. We should remember to distinguish between *official* and *personal* responsibility.

If then, as is contended on all hands, it is necessary, that the bishops receive their information from the presiding elders relative to all the various and perplexing questions connected with stationing the preachers, etc., it is respectfully submitted here, would it not be better that those affected by such a necessity, choose or *elect* the persons whom they prefer to give the advice and exercise the control spoken of? The reader will do well to keep cool, and not become indignant or startled at this proposition. It is made in good faith, and deserves calm and impartial consideration.

In case the office were made elective, *annually*, or less frequently, say *quadrennially*, all difficulties of the character above named would be avoided. The bishops then would be counseled by those who would secure the support and hearty co-operation of the great majority of the members of the annual conferences. And if from any cause, dissatisfaction should arise, the officer occasioning it might be removed; or

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which is the same thing, the conference could decline to re-elect him.

The presiding elders may, to a certain extent, be understood to be the representatives of the great body of the itinerant ministry. And in no sense, properly speaking, are they the representatives of the bishops. True, in the intervals of the annual conferences, they are charged with the work of supplying all the circuits and stations in their respective districts, with ministerial service and pastoral oversight. But in this respect, they are never understood to be the agents or representatives of the episcopacy. Hence, the episcopacy are in no way responsible for their conduct and administration.

It is known that the presiding elders are placed in the position they now occupy, to give the necessary information to the bishops in making out the appointments. And upon the information thus conveyed, their action in regard to the question just named, is based. In this respect, therefore, to all intents and purposes, the presiding elders represent their ministerial brethren. Each member of an annual conference has inherently as much authority to advise and communicate with the bishops in reference to his appointment, as the presiding elder. But inasmuch as such a course frequently might be embarrassing to all the parties concerned, we have, by common consent, committed this to the elders. The whole question of our appointments is left under

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the conjoint direction of the bishops and the presiding elders. We elect the former, and why not the latter? Originally, it will be remembered, they were elected. And why should they not be, now that they have the chief share of the appointing power of the church?

If the episcopacy, who because of the nature and circumstances of their office, have no *personal* interest involved, without any direction from the eldership, made the appointments, then all would be content; and without a word of complaint, each one would pursue his appointed way. But so long as our brethren in the eldership hold their present relation, we must contend, they should be chosen by the *conferences* and not by the bishops. If, as doubtless it is apparent to all, it would be impossible in the present state of things, for the bishops satisfactorily to fix the appointments, without the aid of some confidential advisers, it is deemed right and proper that the ministry should designate the persons to whom they are willing to confide so important a trust.

It should also be remembered, that we *elect* bishops, elders, deacons, the secretaries and stewards of annual conferences, committees, editors, book agents, missionary secretaries, and the General Conference itself. And if it be Methodistic to do all this, why may we not go a step farther, and elect presiding elders also? There surely could be no serious difficulty in such a modification of our economy as would secure to us this

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privilege. The bishop of an annual conference, as we have shown, must have advice and counsel in making out the appointments, and arranging the work for the several districts, circuits, and stations. And would not the conference be likely to make as judicious a selection of persons to give this advice as he could? Are they not indeed better acquainted with the men than he can be? And certainly there would be nothing in such an arrangement to perplex or incumber the episcopacy. It would, on the contrary, free them from much unpleasant responsibility and care. It would also relieve us of the unpropitious influence attendant upon a marked and general disaffection toward an office of acknowledged and general utility.

In the examination of this feature of the question, no allusion has been made to the popular arguments which may be deduced from *republican* views of the rights of the parties interested. These have been passed by, not for want of a proper estimate of their truth and force; but because others of greater moment have demanded our attention. The *irresponsibility* of the presiding eldership, is fraught with the most dangerous tendencies; and is contrary to our economy and usage in all other respects. Class-leaders, exhorters, stewards, trustees, local preachers, traveling ministers, the regular officers of annual conferences, book agents, the officers of the General Conference, the bishops, and the General Conference itself, are all in a measure under

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the control, and responsible to the parties most interested in their action. But the presiding eldership is not thus responsible. Nor can it be, as at present constituted.

Nor have any personal considerations induced the foregoing remarks. It has been the good fortune of the author, never to conceive himself afflicted or oppressed in any of these particulars. Still he cannot close his eyes to a growing hostility toward the office under consideration. And he is grateful to know, that it is his privilege, to speak freely of the origin of this hostility. He is fully persuaded something must be done to remedy the evil; otherwise, results for which we are not prepared may soon transpire.

It should also be kept in mind, that the presiding elders are not always chosen as the discipline directs. Rumor has given currency to the practice of a measure which is, in our opinion, pernicious to the last degree. It may to some appear unseemly to use such language. But the custom of which we speak is so much opposed to what may be called Methodistic propriety, and so entirely at variance with the general spirit of our institutions, that it seems to us, we use the mildest terms that can be employed in alluding to it; and we say the least we can in pronouncing it *pernicious*. We refer to the fact of the presiding elders, at the close of their official term, nominating their successors. That the bishops are shut up to the necessity of regarding, or are, in the

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proper sense of the term, bound by such a nomination, we do not pretend to say. But that they generally make the appointment in this manner, is a fact of common notoriety.

And again, the presiding elders, it is known, are all in council with the bishops in reference to their *own appointments*, as well as those of others. This gives them undue and improper advantage over their brethren. They have an opportunity of influencing the minds of the bishops that all do not enjoy. This circumstance has frequently produced serious and well-founded complaints. If the office were made *elective*, the brethren filling it would be relieved of this delicate embarrassment. The conferences could by ballot elect the presiding elders for all the districts within their bounds, and the persons thus elected would be promoted to the honors and responsibilities of the office, not by the absolute authority of the bishops, but by the suffrages of their brethren. In this manner, the bishop's cabinet would be composed of men whose knowledge and experience, together with the support and approval of their brethren, would make them safe advisers. And in that event, the presiding elders would not be compelled, as is the case in our present arrangement, to discuss or hear discussed, their own qualifications for any particular post. For it is presumable, if the cabinet discuss the ability and fitness of their brethren for any department of the work, their own qualifications for positions to

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which it is contemplated they may be assigned, must receive due consideration. If named for any particular point, and after subsequently discussing the suitableness of their talents, etc., it should be concluded to be an unsafe movement to make the appointment, as at first designed, the conclusion certainly must be very annoying and unpleasant to all concerned. The proposition we have made, would in a great measure prevent any and every thing of the sort.

It may perhaps be said in reply to all these things, they are *radicalism*. This, with many, has all the influence and argument of a kind of a *mad dog cry*. It is a summary method of replying to logical conclusions, which it is inconvenient to meet by the ordinary process of rational investigation. The word radicalism, as *used among us*, is full of opprobrium. Any one infected or supposed to be tinged therewith, is immediately pronounced or suspected to be a heretic. *Heresy* and *radicalism*, as used with us, are, in a great measure, synonymous terms. Hence, when any argument for change or improvement in our system is presented, however luminous and forcible it may be, it is deemed sufficient to say, "that is not Methodism, it is *radicalism*." And, if this much cannot be said, to end all controversy, they who *reason* thus, will say of the *person* using the argument, "he is no Methodist; he is a *radical*." But call the positions we have taken, and the views we have presented, radicalism, or anything

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else that may best suit the taste to be gratified, and the end to be accomplished, they are entertained by multitudes of our people and preachers, and by none with greater honesty and sincerity than the author himself.

It has been proposed to remedy all these difficulties by *abolishing* the office altogether. This, it is alleged, might be done, by increasing the number of bishops, so that at least one bishop could reside within the territory of each conference. There are now twenty-nine annual conferences. Several of these, being too large, must be divided; so that we shall soon have at least *forty* conferences. Then, according to the plan suggested, we shall need forty effective bishops. These forty conferences, in the plan of episcopal visitations, could be divided into four general districts, and committed to the oversight of the bishops residing within their bounds. These general districts could be subdivided, so as to suit the convenience of the bishops having them in charge. Thus each bishop, beside traveling through the length and breadth of the conference in which he might have his residence, would be called upon annually, to preside at not more than two or three conferences. And in turn, during the four years intervening between the General Conferences, they would all pass officially through the entire field assigned them. The next plan of visitations could be so arranged as to make a complete change. In this manner we would keep up, in the fullest and

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most comprehensive sense, an *itinerant general superintendency*. Nor would this measure in any way tend to *diocesan* episcopacy, so much dreaded among us. Each bishop would become familiar with the preachers and members of our church in the conference, including his residence, and in company with the presiding bishop, could understandingly make all the appointments. This plan would also be much less expensive than the presiding eldership. Instead of supporting from five to ten presiding elders, each conference would be responsible for the support of *one* bishop. Still, however, if each bishop, besides attending to his regular episcopal duties, were required to conduct the trial of ministers accused of any offense, and look after various other matters now under the supervision of the presiding elders, there would be more work to do than any ordinary man could perform. It is true all these things, or at least a large portion of them, might be provided for, so as to materially relieve the episcopacy, and impose upon them lighter burdens than they are compelled to bear by our present method.

Nevertheless, the plan, if practicable, would be liable to many objections, that could not be urged against the proposition to make the office *elective*. This, it seems to us, would be more in keeping with the true spirit and evident design of our institutions and economy. And doubtless it would answer every purpose.

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Nor would it in the least-wise circumscribe the episcopacy or the eldership. It would rather promote a pleasant understanding between these, and other departments of our system, and secure the healthy and vigorous action of the whole.

That something must be done, few of us can deny. The difficulties connected with this question are constantly increasing, and unless soon remedied, may become too formidable to be overcome. These difficulties are not merely incidental, but results emanating from perfectly natural sources. The relation between the episcopal office and that of the presiding elders, as at present chosen and constituted, cannot do otherwise than excite suspicion, alarm, and murmuring.

The bishops of our church, are, without doubt, pious and wise men, and their office, it is admitted, is an essential feature of our system. Yet, holding communications of the most exclusive and confidential character, with *officers* entirely, and absolutely as such, *under their control*, must result in the unpleasant consequences above mentioned, to a greater or less extent. We repeat, that the *presiding eldership* is responsible to the bishops, and to them *only*. As before stated, if the *presiding elder* do that for which he may be suspended or expelled, he may be dealt with according to discipline; and while under censure, he could not be reappointed by the bishops to the office. Before this

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could be done, he must be restored by his ministerial brethren. Yet, he may be as an *officer*, unacceptable in the highest degree; he may be tyrannical, overbearing, and inefficient beyond endurance, and still be secure in his office. His brethren, who know him, and labor with him, may reprove and censure, but they cannot *displace* him.

That the bishops, in this state of things, would appoint a man to the office, is not probable, provided they were *apprised of the facts* in the case. But there is no method by which we can communicate with them, on this subject, without seeming to be uncharitable or insubordinate. In other words, there is no constitutional provision, by which we can make our grievances known. In this matter, we have nothing to do, but to endure and obey.

It is true, we may, by a vote of an annual conference, make a *general* request of the bishops, as was done a few years since by one of the Western conferences. Or we may do as one of the Eastern conferences did. But what can we accomplish by these things? The result may easily be foreseen. In one of our annual conferences, the name of which it is not necessary to mention, a resolution was passed, requesting the bishops not to appoint the same persons to the office of a presiding elder for more than one term, etc. The design of this was to remove from the office, individuals who had been in it so long, as to produce serious dissatisfaction. The

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issue of the matter was, the ensuing General Conference declared all such resolutions null and void. And this could not have been otherwise in view of the constitution. The resolution referred to, was too *general*, and not sufficiently specific. And, furthermore, as already stated, it was *unconstitutional*, hence, null and void.

The instance which occurred in the Eastern conference, was on this wise. Certain brethren connected with the conference, had so long and inefficiently filled the office, that a change was deemed absolutely necessary. It was alleged that the strength and prosperity of the church, were seriously impaired. The complaints of the preachers and people were loud and frequent. Accordingly, a protest against the reappointment of these men, was prepared and handed to the presiding bishop. It was signed by a large number of the members of the conference. In this protest they declared, for reasons stated, they could no longer consent to serve the church, under the direction of the elders then in office. Upon the adjournment of the body, those who had signed the protest were requested to remain a short time. The excitement became intense. However, after numerous explanations, and an assurance that the grievances complained of, would be remedied at the next conference, the protest was withdrawn. And for one whole year these presiding elders labored with brethren, a majority of whom had protested

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against their appointment. True, the protest was withdrawn; but it was done with the distinct understanding, that the grievances, of which complaint had been made, should be inflicted upon those protesting, *only one year longer*. In this case, how much better it would have been for all concerned, had the office been *elective?*

This question, with others which were alleged to be equally important, many years ago, excited much attention in our church. It was ably and warmly discussed. Men of great strength and renown engaged in the controversy. It was not then deemed proper to make the changes proposed. Consequently, a separate organization was established, and professedly upon more liberal and popular principles. The limited success of this movement, should admonish the friends of progress, not in any case, to abandon the church. Much more may be accomplished by those who desire reform, if they remain in the body which needs reformation. To leave the church for such a purpose, is the most injudicious and suicidal measure that could be adopted. It is true there may be circumstances in which disciplinary dereliction, as well as doctrinal heresy, may justify such a step as withdrawal from the church. But such cases are extremely rare.

Where there is a curtailment of the freedom of the press, and the right of speech, it might be proper to protect ourselves from the odium of excommunication,

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to voluntarily retire from a church or society, in which this kind of oppression and tyranny is used. But such is not the state of things in our church at the present day. Whatever might have been the facts at the time before alluded to, we may now write and speak without the least restraint. We consider it an uncharitable aspersion upon our good name, to intimate that in the discussion of any topic connected with our church polity, we may not use the "largest liberty."

Of course we would not be understood to say, that we may write or speak so as to produce strife and confusion, and foster heresy and schism. We must remember free speech and a free press, are one thing, and unbridled, reckless licentiousness, is another. In the latter, no one may indulge — the former, is the privilege of all — a privilege nowhere better secured than in the system of government established by the Methodist Episcopal Church. We admit there is occasionally an overawing influence brought to bear against an honest and independent expression of opinion among us. A crouching sycophancy to men in power, has frequently tolerated and invited encroachments upon the freedom to which we have alluded, and oppressed those who have been bold enough to use it.

But this evil may be remedied by appealing to the law and constitution of Methodism, and a fearless and prudent advocacy of the right. Christianity and *true*

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Methodism secure to us this liberty. Nor should we, in any case whatever, suffer it to be taken from us. While, therefore, we may not, in the discussion of these topics, or any others, display unchristian warmth and vehemency, it is alike our duty and privilege to use the greatest zeal and candor. To the highest tribunals of the church we can have access by argument, remonstrance, and petition. And to these we may look, with the assurance, that so far as they are concerned, a wise and equitable decision will be obtained.

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CHAPTER IX.

ITINERANCY.

Ministry composed of two classes—Scripture argument in favor of itinerancy—Suited to our country—Testimony of Dr. Baird—Quotation from Stevens' Church Polity—History of an itinerant soon told—Inadequate support—Quotation from Strickland on the "Genius and Mission of Methodism."

THE ministry of our church consists of two classes—the *itinerant* and the *local* ministry. We shall confine our attention in this chapter, to the first class. The traveling connection are divided into the effective, supernumerary, and superannuated ministry. The *effective* preachers, are those who are in the regular work, and have health and strength sufficient to perform all the duties of the ministerial office. The *supernumerary* preachers are those, who on account of feeble health, etc., are unable to do more than partial service. The *superannuated* ministry, are those whose health and strength have so far failed, as altogether to disable them from any active service. As the term imports, they are *worn out.*

The peculiar characteristic of our ministry is, that it is *itinerant.* Other churches occasionally employ traveling evangelists. Men of a warm and ardent temperament,

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having strong faith and zeal, and favored with unusual success, are chosen for the particular purpose of visiting and encouraging the churches and congregations, where their services may be needed or desired. This, however, is rather an occasional, or incidental arrangement. But itinerancy is an *essential* part of our economy. We have adopted this, because we believe it to be the most scriptural and efficient method of preaching the gospel. It is not our design to argue the merits of other systems. If our brethren of other denominations, prefer a stated or resident ministry, they should be permitted, without molestation, to enjoy and sustain such a ministry. The objections we may entertain against their mode, need not here be mentioned. However, we may say, we are persuaded "ours is the more excellent way." And of course, none will complain of us on this account.

The scriptures afford abundant proof that the ministry of the primitive church were chiefly *itinerant.* In Matthew, x. 5–11, it is said: "These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying: Go ye not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. *And as ye go, preach,* saying the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, and cast out devils; freely ye have received, freely give. Provide neither gold nor silver for your purses, nor scrip for *your*

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journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat. And into whatsoever *city or town ye shall enter*, inquire who in it is worthy; and there abide *till ye go thence.*" In the parable of the marriage feast, the servants, who were evidently designed to represent the christian ministry, were commanded to *go into the highways*, and bid as many as they *could find* to the marriage. Accordingly, they went forth into the highways, and gathered together all, as many as they found, and thus the wedding was furnished with guests. The seventy disciples who were *sent out* by our Lord, to heal the sick, and declare that the kingdom of God had come, were directed to go "two and two before his face, *into every city and place*," whither he himself might come. Those who were scattered abroad by the persecution of the church at Jerusalem "*went everywhere preaching the word.*" After preaching Christ to the eunuch and baptizing him, Philip was caught away by the Spirit of the Lord, and was not heard of or found until he arrived in Azotus. From thence he went forth and "*preached in all the cities, till he came to Cesarea.*" Paul, on a certain occasion, said to Barnabus: "Let us *go again* and visit our brethren *in every city* where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do." Timothy and Titus, as we may gather from the epistles written to them, were both *traveling elders or bishops*. These quotations, which might be greatly

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multiplied together with the history of the travels of St. Paul, and the labors of his brethren in the apostleship, afford us as clear and decisive proof as can be desired, that the ministry of the primitive church were chiefly *itinerant*. And thus constituted, they could fulfill their glorious mission; which was, to "*go into all the world*, and preach the gospel to every creature."

Of the wisdom and superiority of this peculiarity of our system, we have abundant and decisive proof in our unparalleled success. It has indeed worked well. The results thereby accomplished far exceed any thing of the kind known in all the history of modern christianity. It affords us unspeakable pleasure to admit that much good has been done by the labors of the stated ministry connected with the various religious denominations of the day. Inasmuch as they are engaged with us in promoting the kingdom of Christ, we rejoice in their success, and pray that God may bless the work of their hands. But our method, we apprehend, has answered our purpose admirably; and, in many respects, it is best suited to the condition of our country, and the present state of society.

It frequently is urged as an objection to our itinerant system, that it takes away the right of the people to choose their own ministers; and frequently removes from congregations pastors, who the people desire to remain. As *Methodists*, our people certainly cannot claim any right of this kind. The rights of the mem-

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bership, in this particular, are clearly marked and well-defined in our constitution. Here we learn that there has been a mutual concession or sacrifice. The people have yielded their right to choose a minister, and the ministry have yielded their right to choose their congregations. The one sacrifice involved the other; nor should either be made *alone*. If our system frequently removes a minister with whom the people are pleased, and who they desire to remain; it also, occasionally, removes those, who the people are more than willing shall leave. And if a minister be taken away from a congregation, to which he may be attached by the strongest and most endearing associations of friendship, it now and then happens he pursues without regret, his journey to some new and more desirable post of labor.

Removals, when desired by either the people or their pastors, are made among us, with much less inconvenience and dissatisfaction, than occur in almost all cases, where a change is desired or deemed necessary, and accomplished in the usual manner, among other denominations. And if one congregation be favored with the services of a popular preacher, another may not be so fortunate. But in turn, all may be served acceptably and efficiently. Hence our system, on the whole, is calculated to meet and gratify the preferences of the greatest number. And beside all this, it affords us an opportunity of doing much good

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in thinly settled regions of country, where a resident ministry could not be supported. The backwoodsman scarcely completes his cabin in the wilderness, ere the itinerant pays him a visit, and invites him to seek a "better country"—a "more enduring substance" in heaven. However remote or isolated the locality; and however rude and uncultivated the state of society to be met, our system is adapted to the emergency, and affords us every where an opportunity to fulfill our glorious mission to the world. It also makes an advantageous distribution of the talents of our ministers. Many among us, who, in the itinerancy, have been eminently useful, as resident ministers, could have been of little service to the church or the world. The great variety of talents possessed by the entire body of ministers, being thus as it were blended in one common stock, is employed for the improvement and elevation of all the departments of our work.

Dr. Baird, a Presbyterian writer of much note, in his work upon "Religion in America," makes the following allusions to our economy, "It has been said, with truth, that the Methodist church is, in its very structure, missionary; and it is an inexpressible blessing that it is so, as the United States strikingly prove. The whole country is embraced by one General Conference; it is again subdivided into thirty-two annual conferences, each including a large extent of country, and divided into districts. Each district comprehends

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several circuits, and within each circuit there are from five or six, to twenty preaching places. Ordinarily, as often as once in a fortnight, a circuit preacher conducts a regular service at each of these preaching places, whether it be a church, school-room, or a dwelling-house. In the largest towns and villages such services are held on the sabbath, and on a week day or evening in other places; and thus the gospel is carried into thousands of remote spots in which it never would be preached upon the plan of having a permanent clergy, planted in particular districts and parishes. It was a remark of the celebrated Dr. Witherspoon, that 'he needed no other evidence that the Rev. John Wesley was a great man, than what the system of itinerating preaching presented to his mind, and of which that wonderful man, as he conceived, was the author.' The observation was a just one. It is a system of vast importance in every point of view, capable of being made to send its ramifications into almost every corner of the country, and to carry the glad tidings of salvation into the most remote and secluded settlements, as well as to the more accessible and populous towns and neighborhoods."

The following remarks, taken from Stevens' Church Polity of Methodism, are so much in point, so truthful, and so well expressed, they are inserted here at length. Speaking of the itinerancy, this author says: "It comports with the design of the christian ministry. Chris-

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tianity was not designed to be, like Judaism, a local system, but aggressive, until it should be universal. The missionary idea should not be incidental, as it is in the systems of most modern churches — dependent on casual impulses and occasional liberality, but should be incorporated into the very constitution of the ministry — its ostensible characteristic. Such was the meaning of the divine commission — 'Go ye into all the world.' Such was the character of the primitive ministry during its itinerant operations. The truth broke forth on the right and on the left, until it overspread and outspread the Roman Empire. When it pleased God to raise up Wesley, only about two or three incidental forms of aggressive action were to be found in the Protestant churches. He was providentially led to introduce an arrangement which should put Protestant lands themselves under a great system of missionary operations — itinerant circles of ministerial labor, which, while they conveyed the gospel to the millions of domestic heathen who had scarcely been affected by the existing localized system, should also send forth tangents of evangelical light to the millions abroad.

It has an inestimable influence on the ministry itself. It is an heroic training which the greatest military captains might applaud. We need not enlarge here. Any reflecting mind must perceive that such a system as the Methodist itinerancy is remarkably adapted, as a

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vehicle, for the enthusiastic energy which characterizes fervid and highly devotional minds, and is equally fitted to keep alive that energy. It is also well suited to preclude men of false character, for it is almost entirely a system of sacrifice. By its access to all classes, it affords an invaluable knowledge of human nature; by its constant exercise, it produces athletic frames and energetic temperaments; by its incessant labors, an exclusive devotedness to one work; by its frequent changes, a pilgrim spirit. Most of its laborers may say, with their great poet,

'No foot of land do I possess,
No cottage in this wilderness,
A poor wayfaring man;
I lodge awhile in tents below,
And gladly wander to and fro,
Till I my Canaan gain.'

This effect the world witnesses. Do we assert too much when we say, that for one hundred years the Methodist ministry, though mostly uneducated, have transcended in labors, in results, and in conservative adherence to their great principles, any other body of men engaged in moral labor on earth?

It distributes in turn, to most of the societies, the various talents of the ministry. This is an important consideration to those who have witnessed its operations, but it can only be alluded to here. Many men of fervid spirit and deep piety have little talent for

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disciplining the church. Their discourses are chiefly hortative; they are instrumental in great revivals and additions to the membership. It is obvious that such talents need a rapid distribution. The soul must not only be converted, but *trained* in piety. By an itinerant system such men are changed from position to position, arousing dull churches, breaking up new ground, invading and reclaiming ungodly neighborhoods. By the same system, prudent men, with talents for instructing and edifying the converted masses, follow the former, gathering up and securing the fruits of their labors. Some pastors are addicted chiefly to experimental and practical preaching; others to the illustration and defense of doctrinal truth. Some are most effectual in the social services, and in pastoral labors; others in the ministrations of the pulpit. Some have ability only for spiritual labors; others are skillful in managing and invigorating the fiscal resources of the church, in erecting new chapels, and promoting the benevolent enterprises of the times. Now, it is clear, that the frequent distribution of these various gifts, wisely adapted to the local wants of the various churches, must be an extraordinary cause of energy and success, and such we shall by and by see has actually been its effect.

It produces a sentiment of unity throughout the church. In no sect is there more co-operation—more of the *esprit du corps*. Scarcely is a church erected,

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or any important measure attempted, that does not enlist the common sympathy of the body; and this results, to a great extent, from our having pastors who, by frequent changes, become individually common to us all.

By it one preacher can supply a plurality of societies. This is one of its capital advantages. In a sparse population, a single circuit sometimes takes in ten or twenty appointments. Methodism has thus supplied our frontier for fifty years with the gospel. The usual stationary ministers wait for the *call of the people*, except in their collateral missionary labors: the Methodist ministry goes forth to *call the people*. This is one of its strongest points of contrast. It is the *missionary church*. Its adaptation in this respect to our own country is worthy of remark. While the great moral revolution of Methodism was going on across the Atlantic, the greatest political revolution of modern times was in process on our own continent; and when we contemplate the new adaptations of religious action which was evolved by the former, can we resist the conviction that there was a providential relation between the two events? That they were not only coincident in time, but also in purpose? While Wesley and his colaborers were reviving christianity there, Washington and his compatriots were reviving liberty here. It was the American Revolution that led to the development of the resources of this vast country and rendered it

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the assembling place of all kindreds, tongues, and people; and Methodism commenced its operation sufficiently early to be in mature vigor by the time that the great movement of the civilized world toward the West began. It seems to have been divinely adapted to this emergency of our country. If we may judge from the result, it was raised up by Providence more in reference to the new than to the old world. Its peculiar measures were strikingly suited to the circumstances of the country, while those of every other cotemporary sect were as strikingly unadapted to them. The then usual process of a long preparatory training for the ministry could not at all consist with the rapidly increasing wants of the country. The usual plan of local labor, limited to a single congregation or to a parish, was inadequate to the wants of Great Britain at that time; but much more so to those of the new continent. That extraordinary conception of Wesley, an itinerant ministry, met, in the only manner possible, the circumstances of the latter. No one can estimate what would have been the probable result of that rapid advancement which the population of the United States was making beyond the customary provisions for religious instruction, had not this novel plan met the emergency. Much of what was then our frontier, but since has become the most important states of the Union, would have passed through the forming period of its character destitute, to a great extent, of the

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influence of christian institutions; but the Methodist ministry has borne the cross, not only in the midst, but in the van of the hosts of emigration. Methodist itinerants are found, with their horses and saddle-bags, threading the trail of the savage, cheering and blessing with their visits the loneliest cottage on the furthest frontier. They have gone to the aboriginal tribes, and have gathered into the pale of the church more of the children of the forest than any other sect. They have scaled the Rocky Mountains, and are building up christianity and civilization on the shores of the Columbia. They are hastening down toward the capital of Montezuma; while, through the length and breadth of our older states, they have been spreading a healthful influence which has affected all classes, so that their cause not only includes a larger aggregate population than any other sect, but especially a larger proportion of those classes whose moral elevation is the most difficult and the most important—the savage, the slave, the free colored man, and the lower classes generally."

This, perhaps, may be deemed a "high-wrought eulogy." We apprehend, however, it is amply sustained by the facts in the case. A scripture rule of judgment, is to determine the character of a tree, *by its fruit*. Let us, therefore, here pause a moment and contemplate the marvellous success of this plan. Fifty years ago we numbered *two hundred and eighty-seven* preachers, and about *sixty-five thousand* members. We

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have now, including those of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, *five thousand one hundred and ninety-eight* traveling, and *nine thousand two hundred and sixty-nine* local preachers, and *one million one hundred and seventy thousand* members. Besides these, there are about *one thousand* ministers, and *one hundred thousand* members connected with other Methodist churches in our country, making the aggregate results of our system, *fifteen thousand* ministers, and nearly *thirteen hundred thousand* members. This success is unparalleled. There has been nothing bearing any resemblance to it since the apostolic ages. How different the result would have been had we depended upon a settled or resident ministry, may be gathered from the history of the denominations who have been in the field with us. Take one instance only. The Protestant Episcopal Church, which in many respects has always had a decidedly advantageous position, now numbers throughout the United States a little over *fifteen hundred* ministers, and *seventy-three thousand* members, very little more than our annual increase frequently has been. Numerous facts of the character of that just mentioned might be presented here. But we forbear.

It has already been intimated that the system of itinerancy is one requiring great sacrifice. This is emphatically true in reference to the preachers and their families. The history of christianity, in any age,

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since the times of the apostles, does not afford more thrilling instances of heroic devotion to the cause of truth, than those which might here be cited. The life of an itinerant Methodist preacher is short; his history is soon told. Prompted by a conviction that he is "called of God and moved by the Holy Ghost," to devote his strength and talents, exclusively to the work of saving souls, he offers himself as a candidate for admission into the traveling connexion. His business is hastily arranged, or rather closed and abandoned. With his little family he starts on his career of toil and endurance, little knowing what will befall him or them. And it is well they do know but little in this particular. Very probably, his first year in the field, among strangers, he follows some member of his household to the grave. The ensuing year another—and then another, and at length all are taken away; until finally, worn out with the fatigues of his journey, he lies down to die, and covets the quiet rest of the tomb. Or, perhaps, he himself, by excessive toil, the constant demand upon his time and strength, and the accumulation of numerous and overpowering cares, is hurried to the house "appointed for all the living;" and leaves behind him a homeless and destitute family, by whom to be cared for and looked after, he cannot tell. To forsake all the endearments of home, and with no prospect of any adequate pecuniary recompense, engage in the arduous duties of a Methodist preacher;

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to dwell among strangers, and with the most scanty support that can be given, to labor and suffer—to live and die, in this work, a man will need an unusual amount of patience, zeal, and devotion.

The author is aware, the impression has gone forth, that ample provision is made by our church for the support of her ministers and their families. But, surely there never was a more palpable error. The Rev. W. P. Strickland, in his work on the "Genius and Mission of Methodism," in advocating the claims of superannuated preachers, and the widows and children of deceased preachers, says: "We plead for those who were to have 'no inheritance on earth;' but who, 'leaving houses and lands,' and separating themselves from all worldly employments, were, by the very nature of their office and work, forbidden to 'serve tables,' or to engage in any of the various money, land, or trade speculations of the day, for the purpose of either *support* or gain; for those who were set apart in an exclusive vocation, and were required to 'give themselves wholly to the work of the ministry.'

We plead for mothers and children who have shared in the privations, hardships and sacrifices of a pastor's life; who, while engaged in the itinerancy, could call no place home; for those who, as strangers and pilgrims, journeyed from place to place, and who, in their wanderings, have left, perhaps, a daughter sleeping in the silent graveyard of some distant circuit, or a son

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in some remoter spot resting among strangers; for those whom Providence had called to follow their leader and guide in his weary marches, until, faint with the fatigues and labors of his ministry, he fell at his post in the midst of the conflict. We plead for the dear ones to whom, when dying, he had nothing to leave but a husband's and father's blessing,—commending them to the church as the only friend and protector left them of God. Many have we known, who, when entering upon the work of the ministry, had houses and lands and personal estate, and whose prospects were as flattering as any for affluence in this world, but who cut off from all worldly things, and, shut up to the service of him who 'had not where to lay his head,' abandoned all, and in the course of a few years, being unsupported by the church, were obliged to consume their property in the education and maintenance of their family. We plead for the widows and orphans of those whose hands were open as charity to every call of the church and plea of humanity.

We confess it is one of the most sad and melancholy pictures upon which our mind ever rested, to see the wife and children of such men, 'of whom the world was not worthy,' and '*whose praise was in all the churches,*' wandering about from place to place, to seek for the friends who loved and almost idolized their earthly protector while living, but who had strangely and suddenly forgotten both him and his family when dead.

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Melancholy as it is, the picture, alas! is so true as to be recognized in all its lines and shadings by every itinerant; and gladly would he blot it out as it passes before him like some painful vision of the past. As that which is least courted and worst dreaded, like a frightful specter haunts the imagination and produces gloomy forebodings, so the trials and sufferings of many a faithful minister's wife and children rise up before him, and fill him with sadness. Unpleasant though it be, justice requires the picture to be faithfully drawn.

Death has arrested the faithful laborer, and the church has borne its pastor to the tomb. See that family weeping beside the grave of all they held most dear on earth, while every clod which falls upon the coffin is as the knell of their earthly hopes. With sad and sorrowful hearts, they leave the place of graves, and return — but not to their home. *Home!* they have none. Death, which dissolved the tie that bound pastor to people and people to pastor, has severed the family from that relation too; and the parsonage, humble though it be, must be vacated for another, who is called to fill the place of the deceased. Houseless and homeless wanderers! who shall care for ye now? Once ye had friends who vied with each other in offices of kindness and attention to your wants, but whose kindness and attention are suddenly arrested now by the fear of your becoming a burden. At the

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very time ye most need the sympathy of such, your affliction has occasioned an estrangement. It is not enough that your Father's hand has fallen heavily upon you, but gathering all around you, like the waves of the sea in a storm, calamity succeeds calamity, sweeping away every earthly hope. Where shall ye go? Ah! returning echo might answer. Kind words, expressions of sympathy, and letters of condolence, will not provide for them a home, or supply their wants. Sad and disconsolate, and feeling, alas! too sensibly, that she and her children are a burden, the mother gathers what little effects may be left, and removes to a former place of residence, where so much kindness was manifested during her stay as the minister's wife, and where so many tears gave evidence of sorrow at parting. The *former* friends have either forgotten her, or, unwilling to be burdened by her family, have given her a cold reception, and heartlessly suggested another place as better for her, or more than intimated the propriety of sending her daughters out to work as servants, or warned her against expecting too much from the church, when, at that moment, she is absolutely suffering for the necessaries of life. It is not enough that she who was raised tenderly and in affluence, should forsake her father's house, and mother's love, and sister's affection, and travel through the land among strangers, often living in the wilderness, in rude cabins, scarcely affording

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sufficient shelter from the rude blasts of winter. No, it would seem the church demands even a greater sacrifice than this. Her feelings as well as her comforts must be taxed to the utmost, and if she has not been able to save from the miserable pittance of her husband's 'quarterage,' a competency, she must be charged with willful extravagance, pride, or want of economy."

To anticipate such results, to themselves and their families, and yet proceed without murmuring or complaint, in the work in which these men are engaged, is an unmistakable indication of their ardent devotion to the interests of humanity and the glory of God. There may have been persons, who have been so far deluded, in reference to the duties of the itinerancy, as to esteem it desirable because of its ease and emoluments. In some instances, such persons have gained admission among us. But they have remained only long enough to see their folly, and professedly with a view to the adjustment of some pecuniary interests, etc., have soon retired, and left the field to those who indeed

> "Are bold to take up
> And *firm to sustain* the consecrated cross."

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CHAPTER X.

LOCAL PREACHERS.

Local preachers amenable to quarterly conferences, etc.—Views of bishop Hedding—Exhorters—Class-meetings.

Our economy also recognizes a lower grade of ministers—the *local preachers*. In connection with these, it will be in place to speak of the exhorters, class-leaders, and stewards. A local preacher, is one who preaches as frequently as opportunity may offer, and yet pursues any secular avocation he may prefer. A writer of some celebrity in certain strictures upon Methodism, asserts that in our church there are *four distinct orders* of ministers. He says, "some are itinerant or traveling preachers, others local preachers, others presiding elders, and others bishops. All these *alike* have authority to preach and dispense the sacraments; while, at the same time, each class enjoys privileges peculiar to itself." This statement not only involves a paradox, but is also untrue. We do not teach that there are four ministerial orders. We hold that there are only two, as we endeavored to prove in a former chapter. And when we speak of the local preachers as a "lower grade of ministers," we mean simply that they occupy a less responsible or prominent position than that to which

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their brethren in the regular work may be appointed. Mr. Wesley, who was denounced as a dangerous *innovator*, was frequently assailed by his enemies for having violated the order and discipline of the church, in the employment of such an instrumentality to disseminate his doctrines. In defense of his conduct, he appealed to the scriptures, and the custom of the church at various periods of her history.

The quarterly conferences license those whom they consider proper persons to serve the church in this relation, and annually renew their license, when their gifts, grace, and usefulness warrant it. A local preacher is eligible to the office of a deacon, after he he has preached four years. He may also be elected elder, after he has officiated four years as a deacon. In cases of immorality, etc., the discipline directs that a committee of three or more local preachers, shall be appointed to investigate the charges alleged; and this committee have power to acquit or suspend the party accused, until the ensuing quarterly conference, where the case is properly tried. From the decision of this body, there is an appeal to the annual conference, and their judgment is final.

The local ministry have rendered invaluable service to the chnrch. In labors, zeal, and success, so far as circumstances would permit, they have vied with their brethren in the regular work. God has frequently made them instrumental in opening new and productive

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fields of labor, and establishing flourishing societies. We should also here remind the reader, that local preachers planted Methodism in America. Of course their connection with secular affairs must greatly limit their sphere of usefulness. It is not designed to make any allusions to this point that will afflict or offend any one. Yet truth compels us to say, the utility and efficiency of the ministerial office, are seriously impaired by associating it with any worldly avocation. And hence, many who, if wholly devoted to the work, would have been able and successful ministers, because of the embarrassment just alluded to, have accomplished but little for the church or the world.

The duties and responsibilities of the ministerial office are such as require all the time and strength and talents of those engaged therein. The commingling of business care, and the tumult and strife of trade, with the elevated and all-absorbing engagements that demand the attention of a christian minister, to say the least, is an unseemly and strange combination of things spiritual and temporal. We should be understood here not as speaking of the men, but of the *office*. Formerly the local preachers were more useful perhaps than at the present day. The district conference, which some years since was abolished, brought this class of laborers into the more active duties of the ministry. By their relation to the itinerancy at that time, they appeared more in the aspect and sphere of ministers of

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the gospel. Our local brethren generally are as ready to engage heartily in promoting the interests of Methodism as others. Hundreds of them have proffered their services to the authorities of the church, and remain in the position they now occupy, chiefly because there has been no "open door" into which they could enter. But for this circumstance, they would have been in the itinerant ranks years ago. Still as they have opportunity, or occasion may require, they preach and labor to do good. And as their labors are gratuitously bestowed, they deserve the confidence of the church, and the gratitude of the world.

Bishop Hedding, in a discourse on the administration of discipline, delivered in the year 1841, before the New York and other conferences, after stating that local preachers are to be associated with those engaged in the regular work, and should be understood as their assistants, used the following language:

"It is an erroneous notion that local preachers have nothing to do in executing the discipline of the church. If it were so, it would be altogether improper to ordain them. It is true, they are not to preside in the trial of members, except when they are called to take the place of the traveling preachers; but this is the smallest and last act of administering discipline. The local preachers, as well as the juniors on circuits and stations, have an important part of this work to do. They should reprove offenders, reclaim wanderers, instruct

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ignorant persons, settle disputes between brethren, and reconcile contending parties; and thereby prevent apostacies, crimes, and expulsions; which, in the failure of their care and labor, might scandalize the church, and ruin souls. And, in many instances, the local preachers have a better opportunity than the traveling preachers of performing these parts of the work of discipline; as they are more of the time with the people, are better acquainted with them, and consequently, know better when and where to apply the laws of the church, and prevent scandal and mischief.

In all these things, the local preachers, as well as the junior itinerants, should be instructed and encouraged in their duty; that every one may know his place, and perform his part in his Master's work.

To this end, the preachers having charge should use all suitable means to prevent improper persons from being introduced into the local ministry; or to remove them from it when they show themselves unworthy of that high and holy calling. No one should be licensed, or have his license renewed, except it be evident he is called of God, and can be a blessing to the church, and to the world. Much less should any one be recommended for ordination, unless his talents, piety, circumstances in life, and business in the world, are such as promise usefulness, and will not dishonor the holy calling.

Here, perhaps, it may be my duty to express a fear

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that private friendships, or fear of giving offense, may sometimes have influenced some of the traveling brethren to encourage the licensing, or the ordination of local brethren, against the convictions of their understanding; or, at least, to be silent, when their duty to God and his church required them to oppose the measure.

Our local preachers are now a numerous body of men. Many of them are men of rare talents and piety; and, in general, it is believed, they are a great blessing to the church; and their labors, in connection with those of the itinerants, have made them the honored instruments, in the hand of God, in spreading the gospel through the world. However, as most of them are men of business, as many of them hold civil offices, and in those and other conditions, are liable to be drawn into the political strifes of the day, and to be exposed more than other ministers to the influence of the men of the world; there is reason to fear that their example and business, in some instances, are a dishonor to the holy ministry, and a hinderance to the work of God.

Though most of them are true friends, and real helpers to the itinerants, yet a few have been found who exhibited mournful signs that they were following for the loaves and fishes. And when such men could gain sufficient influence with the people, they did not scruple to undermine the traveling preachers, step into their

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places, and take the means of support which were due to the regular pastors. A few, even of the traveling preachers, finding that (when they should become local) they could influence certain societies to receive them as their pastors, to the exclusion of the traveling preachers, have been so sordid as to ask for a location for that purpose; and have actually employed the office and influence the church had given them, to injure the itinerant system, which, itself, had been the means of making them all they are, either in religion or in the ministry. Against these evils and abuses, the church must keep a watchful eye, check and subdue them in time, or the day is not far distant when, in some parts of the country at least, they will become unmanageable.

The discipline requires that 'every local elder, deacon, and preacher, shall have his name recorded on the journal of the quarterly conference of which he is a member.' And also, that 'whenever any (local) elder, deacon, or preacher, shall remove from one circuit or station to another, he shall procure from the presiding elder of the district, or from the preacher having charge, a certificate of his official standing in the church at the time of his removal, without which he shall not be received as a local preacher in other places.' It is of great importance that there be a strict adherence to these rules; that every man be kept in his place, or be deprived of the office the church has given him, when he has become so degenerate as

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to employ it for private, mercenary, or party purposes, and not for the pious ends for which it was bestowed. Yet it is to be lamented that there have been for several years, and still are, a few local preachers floating about the country on other business than preaching the gospel; some of them operating on subjects injurious to the church; in some instances living on the hospitalities of the people, while their manner of life and teachings injure the cause of Christ, and the very people by whom they are supported. One holds his official membership in one place, and lives in another; others operate in places distant from those where they are recognized as local preachers, while several find themselves obliged to hold their relations in societies where they can be sure of protection, by the influence of party favoritism, from any charges which may be brought against them for their irregularities in other places. If there be any principles in the government of our church which can be made to bear on such men and their deeds, they ought to be applied; if there be no such principles, it is hoped the next General Conference will devise some means by which such evils may be arrested: for if they be allowed to go on, it is impossible to foresee to what extent they may produce mischief and every evil work."

The next class meriting notice, is that made up of those, whose mission is to use the language of expostulation, entreaty, or exhortation. They are designated

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exhorters. This office differs from that of the local ministry, in that it provides for *enforcing*, rather than *expounding* the word of God. It is evident, the great design of this feature of our economy, is to afford an opportunity, to exercise one of the most important and valuable gifts we are called upon to improve. It is said of John the Baptist, "and many other things in his *exhortation* preached he unto the people." It is to be regretted, that so little consequence is attached to this interesting and powerful instrumentality. It frequently happens that men, who are qualified to render eminent service to the church as *exhorters*, entirely destroy their usefulness by *attempting* to preach. The scriptures direct, that as our gifts differ according to the grace given us, those who have the qualification to teach, should attend to teaching; and those who are suited to exhort, should attend to exhortation. Forgetting this very important direction, we have frequently given license to brethren to preach, whose pulpit performances have made a woful impression concerning their efficiency, and are a standing reproach upon the dignity of the ministerial office.

Class-leaders are next in the order of the pastorate of our church. Class-leaders are appointed by the preacher in charge. This is proper, inasmuch as the class-leader, in a certain sense, *represents* the regular pastor of the flock. He attends to those pastoral duties, which cannot so well be looked after by the

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minister in charge, because of the fact, that the itinerant system makes him a comparative *stranger* wherever he goes. The appointment of class-leaders, however, is generally made, with reference to the advice and preferences of the stewards, and other official members of the church. The following remarks fairly state the reasons why this appointment is made by the preacher. "Their work is entirely his; it is pastoral labor. The labors of long circuits would not at first allow the preacher to visit much the members of the local appointments. Leaders did, and still do, this work in another form. It is a spiritual supervision of the church, rightfully pertaining to the ministry; but in this case delegated in part to the leaders. The ministry should certainly have the power to choose their delegates to do their own work." Having but a small number to care for, or watch over, the leader can readily give those under his charge, such advice as may be necessary; and in this way he does that which is done in other churches by the minister. And but for this arrangement, our people would sustain a loss, which could not be remunerated, even by the numerous and manifest advantages of the itinerancy. This, in the absence of the instrumentality of which we are treating, would be an unsafe and inefficient method of operation. And it is a source of serious concern and alarm, that our people, in many places, appear so lightly to esteem this institution.

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Class-meetings are peculiar to Methodism. Other churches have occasional inquiry, conference, or experience meetings. But class-meetings are an *essential* part of our system. All persons uniting with us, are required to attend class, unless prevented by sickness or other circumstances not under their control. It is not claimed that this institution is of divine origin. Like many other peculiarities of our system, it is a prudential regulation, designed to promote spirituality and christian charity among our members. It originated in the following manner. In the month of February, in the year 1742, several "earnest and sensible" men, as Mr. Wesley calls them, connected with the society under his care at Bristol, were together consulting, as to the best method to be adopted, to secure the payment of a debt, incurred in building a "preaching place." It was agreed that the society should be divided into classes of twelve, and one of them should be appointed to collect of each of these, what they might be willing to give. About one month afterward, in conferring with others in London, as to the means by which he might obtain a more correct knowledge of the spiritual condition and progress of those under his care, it was determined to make a similar division of the society there and elsewhere.

The person designated the *leader*, was required to visit each member of his class *at their residence*. This being found too great a task to impose on the leader,

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the members were required to meet together. When met, after proper inquiry, each one present, was exhorted, rebuked, or comforted, as occasion required. For the purpose of extending his personal knowledge of those associated with him, Mr. Wesley visited the classes quarterly; and to those, of the correctness of whose life and character, he was clearly satisfied, he gave tickets, which were considered due and proper evidence of membership. They answered the same end as our regular certificates. The custom is still observed in the Wesleyan Connexion. And it would be an instrument of much good if used among us.

The utility of this peculiar institution is obvious and indisputable. Besides supplying our members with a subordinate pastoral oversight, it promotes a high degree of spirituality, and firmly unites us in the bonds of christian fellowship and charity. The instructions and intercourse thus secured, are eminently calculated to give a permanence and vigor of christian character, that qualify the church to prosecute successfully, the aggressive career marked out for her by the providence of God. And so soon as we become willing to dispense with this feature of our system, our decline and downfall will certainly and rapidly follow. This is one of the ancient landmarks. And it would be almost sacrilege to remove or deface it.

Numerous objections have been urged against class-meetings. Of these we shall say but little. When

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some of the members of the "societies" objected that such things were not thought of or enjoined, at the time they united with them, Mr. Wesley summarily replied, "if they were not, they should have been." When they alleged there was no scripture for any such regulation, he answered, in his peculiar laconic style, "*there is none against it.*"

The scriptures, we may remark, in every possible way sanction and approve, if they do not positively command or enjoin, select meetings for the special benefit of believers. They also plainly teach the *duty* of frequent communion and fellowship one with another. And inasmuch as our societies, and congregations, are always prosperous or decline in proportion as they attend or neglect class-meetings, we should in no case give countenance to those who would lay them aside. We are compelled to add here, that in some instances our preachers and people have exalted this institution above what it was designed to be. It is frequently spoken of, as of more consequence than some of the *divinely instituted* means of grace. Hence, those who neglect it, are deemed more worthy of expulsion from the church, than those who neglect the sacraments of Jesus Christ. All this, however, is contrary to Methodism. It is a mistake or error, into which some have fallen. It is as unseemly and anti-Methodistic to place class-meetings above the Lord's supper, as it would be, to esteem the teaching of John Wesley of greater

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authority than the word of God. Our economy, however, should not be made responsible for the erroneous sentiments of those who may have adopted it.

A word or two in relation to *stewards* must close this chapter. These officers are appointed by the preacher in charge, and the quarterly conference. The preacher *nominates*, and the conference *reject or confirm* the nomination. The duties of stewards are such as render it necessary for them to be "men of solid piety, who both *know* and love the Methodist doctrine and discipline, and of good natural and acquired abilities for the transaction of temporal business." They should be men of comprehensive and liberal views. In no particular have we been more injured than in the selection of persons to fill this office. Men of the most narrow and contracted notions of church polity and business arrangements, are often promoted to this post. And in the performance of their duty, they adopt a system falsely denominated economy, and compel many from absolute necessity to leave the regular ministry, and engage in some secular business to relieve themselves of the embarrassments created by the policy we have named. Parsimoniousness anywhere is offensive and unmanly. But nowhere is it so unbecoming and contemptible, as when exhibited in arrangements for the support and comfort of preachers of the gospel, and their families. To see men of wealth, who have all the comforts and luxuries of life at command, dealing

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out a meager and stinted *support* to their brethren, who have given up the world, to engage in the toils, and endure the privations and sacrifices of the itinerant ministry of the Methodist Episcopal Church, is a revolting exhibition of selfishness, from which the mind turns away with loathing and disgust.

The relation existing between the stewards and the preachers, requires that they be men of sound judgment and great prudence. They are to tell the preachers what they think wrong in them, and advise them in regard to the general management of the work. They are responsible to the quarterly conference, which has power to remove or change them at pleasure.

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CHAPTER XI.

OFFICIARY.

Leaders' Meetings—Quarterly Conferences—Annual Conferences—General Conferences.

THERE are four official bodies connected with our church—the General, annual, and quarterly conferences, and the leaders' meeting—each of which have their appropriate sphere of action and control. *Leaders' meetings* are not held in all of our circuits, or as regularly as they should be in stations. There is no *positive* enactment or provision in our economy, directing that such a meeting shall be held. This, however, is a matter of plain inference. Such an organization is frequently referred to, and the custom prevalent in a large proportion of our connexion, authorizes us to designate it one of the *official* bodies of the church. The discipline makes it the duty of the preacher in charge, to meet the stewards and leaders as *often as possible*. It also requires the leaders to meet the ministers and stewards *once a week*. It is hence apparent, "leaders' meetings" should be held on *circuits*, as well as in stations. However, because of the inconvenience of traveling, etc., to which our official brethren would be

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subjected, it but occasionally occurs, that a leaders' meeting is held on circuits.

The design of these stated meetings of ministers, stewards, and leaders, is to give an opportunity to acquire a correct knowledge of the condition of the church, that those who have the spiritual oversight of the flock, may be informed of any who are sick, or those who walk disorderly and refuse reproof. The reader has already been apprised of the difficulty experienced by the minister in charge, in the performance of his duty, in consequence of being everywhere a comparative stranger. Few are aware of the embarrassment resulting to a pastor from the fact just stated. This, however, where the class-leaders and stewards do their duty, is entirely relieved. Our people sometimes complain that their ministers do not visit them in sickness. And very often this circumstance is spoken of to their injury, and they are represented as negligent and unfaithful. But if the truth were known, the leaders or stewards are responsible for all the difficulty. Failing to make the proper communication to the leaders' meeting, the leader or steward becomes guilty, but the preacher suffers all the blame. The regular business of leaders' meetings, besides informing the minister in charge of any who are sick, or walk disorderly, is to recommend persons to be admitted on probation, or into full connexion, and attend to various incidental matters connected with the spiritual affairs of the church.

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In the reception of members, the usual course is, the minister gives an invitation in the public congregation for persons to join the church; their names are then taken down, and as soon after as may be convenient, a meeting of the leaders and stewards, is held, and the preacher presents for their consideration, the names of the persons who desire admission on trial; and if recommended by the meeting, they are admitted. This is done in compliance with the direction in the discipline, "Let none be admitted on trial, except they are well recommended by one you know, or until they have met twice or thrice in class." To meet this judicious provision, in many places, at the time the invitation is given, the preacher announces the fact to the congregation, that A. B. desires to join on probation, and makes this inquiry: "are there any objections?" If no objections be made, it is assumed that the person making application is duly recommended. However, it frequently happens that neither of these very proper regulations is regarded, and the preacher in charge postpones any and all inquiry, at all *official*, until the probationary term has expired. But it would perhaps generally be the safest and most prudent course, to confer with the leaders and stewards of the church, as first stated.

The leaders' meetings also recommend to the preacher in charge, suitable persons to officiate as exhorters in the church; nor can any receive license

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as such, without this recommendation, except where no leaders' meeting is held; and there, the society or class of which the person is a member, must give the recommendation. They likewise recommend to the quarterly conference those who they deem proper persons to be licensed to preach, and attend to such other business as the minister in charge may present for their consideration. It will thus be seen, this organization is of great advantage to the church. Its importance and utility, however, are not, in many cases, duly appreciated. Many of our people and preachers seem to think it is a matter of but little consequence, whether or not any such meetings are held. In this, their judgment, certainly is greatly at fault.

Quarterly conferences consist of all the traveling and local preachers, exhorters, class-leaders, and stewards associated with any specified circuit or station. They are held once in three months, in connection with what is termed the "quarterly meeting." Quarterly meetings, especially in country places, and on large and populous circuits, are seasons of great religious interest. The most zealous and devoted members of the church come from various points, and after transacting the usual business committed to their care, they unite with the multitude convened on the occasion, in the public worship of God. And as the whole assembly join in praise and prayer, the mighty power of the gospel is often revealed in a wonderful manner, and scores are

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awakened and converted from the error of their ways. And thus, christian fellowship and zeal, and love and confidence are diffused through the entire body of members connected with any particular circuit or station, and an incalculable amount of good is accomplished.

The business of the quarterly conference, is to license proper persons to preach, recommend local preachers for admission into the traveling connexion, and for election to deacon's or elder's orders. They receive, and finally determine appeals from the decision of committees of trial, etc., and attend to various other items of business, as directed by the discipline. The presiding elder is the president of this body, and in his absence the preacher in charge.

Annual conferences are composed of all the traveling preachers in full connexion. There are, including the Liberia Mission, and the Oregon and California, *thirty-one* annual conferences. These are exclusive of those within the territory occupied by the Methodist Episcopal Church South.

The duties and prerogatives of an annual conference, are clearly defined in our book of discipline. They receive suitable persons into the itinerancy, elect those who may be deemed worthy, to deacon's and elder's orders, and examine into the character and usefulness of all engaged in the work. The subject of missions, Sunday schools, the circulation of tracts, the progress and

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operation of the Bible cause, the support of the supernumerary and superannuated preachers, and the widows and children of deceased ministers, and other kindred items of business, receive such attention as time and circumstances permit. The bishops fix the time, and the conferences the place of meeting. The bishops preside, and in their absence, one of the presiding elders, who may be appointed by letter from the bishop, or elected by the conference.

It is generally known that the annual conferences are composed of traveling ministers exclusively. To this some object; and insist there should be a representation of the membership, associated with the ministry. This would be all correct, but for one consideration, viz: annual conferences attend only to such business as properly and exclusively belongs to the ministry. They possess no *legislative* powers, and can do nothing more in reference to any measure at all relating to the membership, than give a mere expression of *opinion*, or offer their *advice*. Should they attempt to do more, their action could be appealed from to the General Conference, and, because of its unconstitutionality, would be null and void.

It is sometimes stated that annual conferences fix the appointments of the preachers. This is a palpable error. The annual conferences have no more to do with making the appointments, than the quarterly conferences, or leaders' meetings. The *bishops* make the

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appointments. It is designed of course to say that this is the constitutional, or *disciplinary* method. If there have been instances in which this order has been infringed, the *system* has been violated, and cannot be made responsible. If, however, annual conferences should be vested with any legislative prerogative; if they had authority to control or bind the laity in any particular, then the representation spoken of would certainly be judicious and necessary.

But perhaps it may be said, that annual conferences receive ministers, or persons to fill the ministerial office, and in this way, their action bears upon the membership. But it will be remembered, they cannot receive any into the itinerancy, until they have been duly recommended by the laity. The membership, in fact, make our ministers, so far as they are made by man at all. A man may not even be licensed to exhort, or labor in the church as a local preacher, unless the *laity recommend* him, as a person suitable for the work. Thus the original license to preach, admission into the traveling connexion, and promotion to the office of a deacon or elder; and indeed the whole ministerial office, depend upon the recommendation and concurrence of the laity. So that, in regard to the reception of ministers to serve the church, the voice and views of the people, are as much consulted among us, as in any other denomination. These are facts, which those who are continually railing at the priestly exclusiveness and

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intolerance of our government, should keep in remembrance. If they would do this, and make a just exposition of our economy, they would find therein more to approve, and less to condemn.

The *General Conference* is composed of one member for every twenty-one members of each annual conference. They may be appointed by *seniority* or *choice*. The latter method, it is believed, is universally adopted, and is far the most satisfactory and equitable. This is properly speaking, the *only* legislative body in the church. The discipline vests in this body "full power to make rules and regulations" for the government of the church. And hence it is designated a *legislative* body. But its legislative powers are so explicitly guarded, and controlled by so many positive restrictions, that the term *legislative* is scarcely appropriate. The laws of the *church*, so far as fundamental principles are concerned, are contained in the word of God. The *laws* of Methodism are set forth in the discipline, and are not susceptible of revision, in the same sense as are our *incidental* regulations.

The following extract from a report adopted by the body to which we allude, in the year 1828, confirms the position we have taken:

"We arrogate no authority to enact any laws of our own, either of moral or of civil force. Our commission is to preach the gospel, and to enforce the moral discipline, established by the one Lawgiver, by those

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spiritual powers vested in us as subordinate pastors, who watch over souls as they that must give account to the chief Shepherd. We claim no strictly legislative powers, although we grant the term 'legislature' and 'legislative' have been sometimes used even among ourselves. In a proper sense, however, they are not strictly applicable to our General Conference. A mistake on this point has probably been the source of much erroneous reasoning, and of some consequent dissatisfaction. Did we claim any authority to enact laws to affect either life or limb, to touch the persons or to tax the property of our members, they ought, unquestionably, to be directly represented among us. But they know we do not. We certainly, then, exercise no civil legislation. As to the moral code, we are subject equally with themselves, to one holy Lord. We have no power *to add to, to take from, to alter, or to modify a single item of his statutes.* Whether laymen or ministers be the authorized expounders and administrators of those laws, we can confidently rely on the good christian sense of the great body of our brethren to judge. These well know, also, that whatever expositions of them we apply to others, the same are applied equally to ourselves, and, in some instances, with peculiar strictness."

The restrictions upon the powers of the General Conference, provide that they shall not, in any event, "revoke, alter, or change our articles of religion, or

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establish any new standards or rules of doctrine." They may not allow of more than one representative for every fourteen members of an annual conference, or for a less number than one for every thirty. They cannot change any part of our government, so as to do away episcopacy, or destroy the plan of our *itinerant* general superintendency. They cannot change our "general rules," or do away with the privilege of our ministers and members, of a trial by a committee, and an appeal, as set forth in the book of discipline. They cannot appropriate the *proceeds* of the Book Concern, or the Chartered Fund, to any other purpose than the support or benefit of the traveling, supernumerary, and superannuated preachers, and their wives, widows, and children. Any of the foregoing restrictions may, however, be modified or abolished, except that relating to *doctrine*, upon the concurrent recommendation of *three-fourths of all the members* of the several annual conferences. A change or modification may be recommended by the General Conference, but cannot take effect, until the majority above stated approve it.

When, therefore, we contemplate the agency our people have in constituting the ministry, such a recommendation as that which is required to give the General Conference authority to make any change in these restrictions, could not be viewed in any other light than the *voice of the great body of the church.*

Nor is it in the leastwise probable, that our ministry,

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will in any particular, oppress the people. They are as much interested in the co-operation of the membership as is possible. They are not a *privileged* class, and claim no exclusive prerogatives which place them beyond the influence of the people. *Without the people* they are entirely powerless. The success of their *ministerial* operations, depends in a great measure upon the concurrence of the laity. They have no clerical fund or revenue, on which they may rely for support, save that which is furnished by the *voluntary* contributions of the people.

The distinguished Dr. Emory, thus speaks on this subject: "We have said that the Methodist Episcopal Church possesses effective and substantial security against any encroachments of tyranny on the part of her pastors. This security, to say nothing of higher principles, is amply provided in the fact, so obvious to common sense, that the interests of the preachers, as men, are not only coincident but identical, with all the interests which bind them to be good pastors; and that these again are identical with the interests of the people. They cannot possibly have any earthly motive for setting themselves in opposition to the people. All human motives are on the other side. And the far greater danger is, that their sense of dependence, and the pressure or apprehension of want, may tempt them, in the general state of our poor fallen nature, to *lower* the gospel standard, and to *relax* its holy disci-

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pline, in accommodation to the common frailties of those who hold over them, and over their wives and children, and all most dear to them, the fearful power of feeding or starving them at discretion. For the sober truth is, that there is not a body of ministry in the world more perfectly dependent on those whom they serve than the Methodist *itinerant* ministry. In those churches which have a lay representation, the pastors make legal contracts with their people, and have legal remedies to enforce their fulfillment. We make no such contracts, and have no such remedies. In this, our system is more scriptural, and renders us more dependent. It places us, in fact, not only from year to year, or from quarter to quarter, but from week to week, within the reach of such a controlling check, on the part of the people, as is possessed, we verily believe, by no other denomination whatever; and which is considered, both by them and by us, as a relinquishment of what might be claimed, on our part, fully equivalent to the relinquishment, on their part, of a direct representation in our General Conference.

These remarks, on the pecuniary check, apply not only to the mode in which the preachers are appointed—on a principle of mutual sacrifice for the general good, and one to which we believe our people are peculiarly attached, in support of an itinerant system—but they apply with equal force to the whole of the official conduct of each individual pastor; and, above all, in his

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appointment of class-leaders, of which so much has been said. That the pastor, agreeably to our discipline, possesses the right, as a branch of his pastoral oversight, to appoint whom he thinks best qualified to aid him, as leaders, and to continue to change them, is not disputed. But it is equally certain, on the other hand, that the means of his support are in the hands of the classes; and that the supplying or withholding it, as *they* judge proper, is as indisputably *their* right. Were a preacher, therefore, governed by no better principle than his own interest, he could not successfully resist the just wishes of the classes by arbitrarily obtruding on them obnoxious leaders. Suppose a preacher should even be so stupid, or so wicked, as to attempt a course of tyrannical appointments. In the first place, he may be arrested at any period of the year, on application to a bishop or presiding elder; and if convicted, may be removed, and degraded from the pastoral charge; or, secondly, supposing it even possible that redress from these sources should be delayed or denied, is it not plain that the classes have the means of redress in their own hands? Suppose they should say to the pastor — and in circumstances of such extremity they would be justified in saying it — If you obstinately persist in the vexatious exercise of an extreme power to force on us obnoxious leaders, we will also exercise our extreme power to withhold our contributions. Where would be his empty boast? Would he not be paralyzed

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at once? Who does not see, then, that on our system, the true effective power is, in reality, in the hands of the people; and more perfectly so, in fact, than in almost any other denomination? It is such a power that the preachers must be mad to provoke its array against them, and more than men to be able to resist it."

It is sometimes alleged, that the ministry are the legal owners, or proprietors of all the church property. But it is as gross a misrepresentation as ever was known. And we confess ourselves at a loss, to know how such an impression ever became prevalent. It certainly cannot be rationally inferred from any of our properly recognized authorities. The following remarks in reference to the position of our ministry in relation to this subject, occur in the notes formerly appended to our discipline.

"In respect to the deed of settlement, we would observe, that the union of the Methodist society, through the states, requires one general deed, for the settlement of our preaching houses and the premises belonging thereto. In the above plan of settlement we have given to the trustees an authority and security they never possessed by virtue of our former deeds, namely, the power of mortgaging or selling the premises in the cases and manner above mentioned. By which we manifest to the whole world, that the property of the preaching houses will not be invested in the General Conference. But the preservation of our

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union and the progress of the word of God indispensably require, that the free and full use of the pulpits should be in the hands of the General Conference, and the yearly conferences authorized by them. Of course, the traveling preachers, who are in full connexion, assembled in their conferences, are the patrons of the pulpits of our churches. And this was absolutely necessary to give a clear, legal specification in the deed. If the local preachers, stewards, and leaders, who have an undoubted right to preach, meet their classes, etc., in the preaching houses at due time, according to the form of discipline, were specified, it would be necessary to add a description of their orders; which would throw such obscurity upon the whole, that a court of justice would either reject the deed, or be at a loss to determine concerning the little peculiarities of our form of discipline. But we do hereby publicly declare, that we have no design of limiting, in the least degree, the privileges of any of the public officers of our society, but by this deed solely intend to preserve the property of our church by such a clear, simple specification, as shall be fully and easily cognizable by the laws."

Our church property is generally deeded to the *Methodist Episcopal Church of the United States.* The *church,* therefore, is the owner. And the bishops, or General and annual conferences, are no more the church than the laity. The property is held in *trust,* by trustees who are almost universally *laymen.* It is

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provided in this trust, as explicitly as language can make it, that the property thus conveyed and held, shall be used for the worship of God, as taught in our economy and usage.

A short time ago we were not a little surprised and astonished in looking over a small work containing a series of dissertations in reply to the inquiry, "Why are you a Lutheran?" to find the following language: "In the Methodist Episcopal Church, the traveling preachers possess the right of controlling the property. Accordingly, the preachers, who are the agents of the bishop, may dispossess the society or congregation of the house of worship, parsonage, etc. By this system, the amount of church property held by the preachers, is said to be little short of four millions. Add to this the Chartered Fund in Philadelphia, of *thirty thousand dollars*, the Book Establishment in New York, estimated at *two or three hundred thousand dollars;* and the funds of the Preachers' Aid Society in Baltimore, and the aggregate will probably amount to considerably above *four millions;* all which, if I am correctly informed, is managed and controlled by the traveling preachers, agreeably to the regulations prescribed, and to the entire exclusion of the laity or members of the church, who were chiefly instrumental in contributing this immense sum."

Now we aver, there is not scarcely a word of truth in this wanton assault. Our ministers cannot as "agents

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of the bishop," or in any other relation, dispossess our societies of church property of any kind. Our preachers, do not, in any sense, *hold, own, or possess* our places of worship, etc. They are all held as before stated, by trustees in trust—and said trustees almost universally are laymen. Our Chartered Fund is also held in a similar manner. Nor is this, or our church property, or the Book Concern, etc., managed and controlled by the ministry to the exclusion of the laity. Our Book Concern and Chartered Fund are both specific and well-defined trusts, and are controlled by certain explicit and definite conditions, which point out the uses to be made of them. Our Book Concern it is true, is under the supervision of agents who are appointed by the General Conference. But these agents and the body by which they are appointed, act under absolute directions, which specify the disposition to be made of its proceeds. The ministry are, by these conditions and specifications, invested with powers and privileges of control, over the funds and property of which we have spoken, only so far as to carry out and execute the design and intent of the original donors. And to whom could such a trust be so safely confided, as to those whose interest must necessarily lead to its faithful observance?

The author of the work containing the extract we have quoted, assures us, all the intimations he has given, are true, *if* he has been "correctly informed." We would

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take the liberty to say, that he has *not* been correctly informed. And we may add, he has consequently misrepresented us. And we hope that he, or some of his learned friends, who have indorsed or recommended his work, will either disclaim the erroneous statement they have made, or furnish the testimony by which they may be prepared to prove its truthfulness.

So far as we are capable of comprehending the meaning of words, and the force and bearing of constitutional and legal restrictions, our ministry have no power, if they had any inclination, to violate or abuse their trust. It appears to us, that whatever influence can control the mind or heart, whether personal or conventional, pecuniary or spiritual, will in all circumstances, and through all coming time, necessarily *protect* the laity, and guide the ministry to an equitable and advantageous exercise and improvement of all the powers and immunities committed to their charge.

In the adjustment of the numerous *financial* interests of the church, the laity now exercise almost exclusive control. But their counsel and co-operation, perhaps, could be more readily secured, and would produce more decisive consequences, if they were associated more closely with us in our ecclesiastical organizations. This, in some instances among our brethren in the South, has been tried with the most satisfactory results. And it would be well for us to give the question due attention and a proper trial. However, as

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it is the author's business to explain and set forth Methodism as it is, rather than as it should be, he conceives that on this point, and all similar subjects, he is required to do nothing more, than make mere suggestions. Having done this in reference to the present inquiry, he leaves it for the further consideration of the people, and the decision of that body appointed to make rules and regulations for the church.

It may be remarked, in conclusion, that a more judicious distribution of governmental powers and responsibilities, than that which is made between all the various bodies of which we have spoken, cannot readily be conceived. Each operating in the sphere pointed out in the constitution, will produce the most harmonious and energetic action of the whole; and the rights, interests, and privileges of all concerned will be amply and permanently secured.

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CHAPTER XII.

THE LAITY.

Manner of receiving members—Baptism, door to the church—Reasonableness of our method—Attention given to religious experience.

HAVING given our views at length, of the rights, privileges, and duties of the ministry, the reader's attention will now be directed to the *laity* of our church. Among other duties, the preacher in charge is directed to *receive*, try and expel members, according to our form of discipline. In the reception of members, the practice of suffrage does not obtain. The question of admission into the church, is in a great measure, confided to the ministers having the oversight of the flock, as those who *must give account*. This, it seems to us, is agreeable to the fitness of things, and in accordance with the scriptures. To all true ministers, Christ has given authority, not only to teach and baptize, but also to receive those, who desire admission to the church. Indeed, baptism is the door into the visible church—and without it no one, properly speaking, can be a member thereof. And baptism is a work exclusively appropriated to the ministry. To this work they are appointed by our Lord Jesus Christ, whose command is, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing

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them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And lo! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." Hence, they are duly authorized to receive those who seek admission among us, This act, however, cannot be consummated, according to our discipline and usage, without the recommendation of responsible persons, already members of the church.

We receive persons on trial for six months. During this period, they have ample opportunity to become acquainted with our doctrines, discipline, and method of operation. If, at the end of six months, or at any point during that period, they become dissatisfied with either, they may withdraw their application, without detriment to themselves or us. And, on the other hand, should we discover that they are not suitable persons to become members of the church, we may decline receiving them; and, without censure, they are laid aside. By our enemies, it is frequently said, we give too little attention to the character and spiritual condition of candidates for membership with us. But certainly our manner of procedure, is the best calculated to furnish the church with a clear and intimate knowledge of the religious attainments of those desiring fellowship with us; and is wisely adapted to the protection of the church against imposition, and the spiritual improvement and security of all concerned.

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Originally, as we have seen, the only condition required of those who desired admission to the *societies*, was a "desire to flee the wrath to come and be saved from their sins." Since, however, instead of being mere societies, we have become a *church*, in the true and proper sense of the term, the method of making this desire known, has been made more explicit. Now it is necessary for those who seek to unite with us, to give assurance of their belief in our doctrine, and a willingness to be governed by our discipline; and also to be baptized. These conditions, however, are all so obviously correct, that nothing need be said in their defense. Of course, no one will desire to join a church, the doctrines of which he does not believe. And, inasmuch as the welfare and success of all organized society, depend in a great measure upon the subordination of the members of which it is composed, we apprehend that it is right, and according to scripture and the custom of the primitive church, to require that our members submit to the authority and government we have adopted. Hence, those who desire to associate with us, are expected to give credence to our doctrine, obey our discipline, and observe the ordinances, as taught and administered by us.

Our doctrines, discipline, and modes of worship, may be gathered from our book of discipline, our standard authors, and the usages that have generally obtained among us. The import of our doctrine and

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the application of our discipline, must be determined with reference to our usage in teaching one, and administering the other. For instance, the regulation prohibiting *men* to sing, unless they "understand the notes and sing the bass," if violated again and again, would not expose the party concerned, to any danger of censure or expulsion. And for what reason? Not because it is not a rule of the discipline, but because of having been disregarded and laid aside as unsuitable, by preachers and people, it has become *obsolete* in the sense of *law*. And so we may say of all other regulations which have been explained or treated in like manner.

For violating any and all of these, a complaint of *insubordination* could not be sustained, because from the beginning we have proclaimed by our actions before the world, that we understand them to be regulations which may be observed or laid aside, as shall be found best in the circumstances. A charge of the character of that just stated, could be maintained only where some principle or measure known, established, and *observed as the law*, is involved. It would be as just and suitable, to expel a member of the church for using any of the innocent luxuries of life, as for disregarding any of these incidental matters. To establish guilt, sufficient to merit excommunication, as before intimated, the act must be against some *uniform* and fundamental feature in the *administration* of discipline,

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as acknowledged and approved by the church. Otherwise, expulsion in such a case, would be absolute despotism.

It is sometimes said, our members have no rights. We answer, they have all the rights at all desirable to possess. In the first place, they may unite with us, or decline to do so at pleasure. And when united with us, they have all the conventional rights secured by our economy. They may, of choice, remove from us, or remain with us. They participate in the transaction of all the various items of business in which they are at all interested. Our stewards, class-leaders, and trustees, are all, generally speaking, *laymen:* and our ministry consists of those recommended and approved by them. The people also build churches, and control them as to their location, style, and occupancy. If they prefer to build a large and splendid edifice, or an humble and unassuming *meeting house*, no one can prevent them. If it be found more convenient or desirable, to sit with their families, and sell, or rent pews, rather than for the men and women to sit apart and have free seats, according to the custom of the past, they have a *right* so to do. Nor does our discipline, in either letter or spirit, curtail this right. All these matters, as we understand the law and custom of the church, are to be settled according to the views and preferences of the *people*.

The discipline, it is true, states that it is contrary

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to our economy, to build churches with pews, etc., and *advises* that those already built, be made free. But it does in no wise contravene the right of the parties thus advised, to use their own judgment, and act accordingly. And, as has been shown in a preceding chapter, this right has been recognized by every department of the authorities of the church. Nor should the laity, on any pretense whatever, permit it to be wrested from them. As members of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and according to *the discipline*, they have this right. It is one they never conceded, and which has never, until very recently, been disputed. We regret to be compelled to admit one exception. This, however, stands alone. There is but one instance of the kind inall the history of the church. We apprehend there never will be another. To an attentive observer, who beholds the premonition of coming events, in the shadows they "cast before them," there is ample assurance that even this will be disclaimed. It would, of course, be unbecoming in us, to say anything to produce strife, or excite insubordination. Yet we repeat it, if this right be assailed in any way, the laity not only have the privilege to *complain*, but it becomes their absolute duty to *resist* such a movement, as unjust and tyrannical. And in so doing, they will be commended by God and man. *Tyranny* is no more government than anarchy. And we are held, morally, no more to the *obedience* of one, than to a participation in

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the other. Indeed, tyranny is anarchy exalted to the seat of power. And no ordinance of God or man, requires us to regard either, except to resist and overthrow them.

The *expediency* of building such churches, is another question altogether. Yet, even of this, the laity must make the final determination. In making up their judgment of this question, they may be advised or counseled by their pastors. But in the event they *honestly* differ with them, they have the right, in a legal and moral sense, to consult their own preferences, and proceed according to their sense of what may be prudent and necessary in the circumstances.

It is by many insisted that our system of government denies to the laity the right of *representation* in the legislative department. This question excited a lengthy and animated discussion at the time it was agitated. An eminent man, who engaged in the controversy reasoned on this wise:

"The right to be represented where law is made to govern, is not only essential to civil freedom, but is equally the basis of religious liberty. Civil and religious liberty are intimately connected; they usually live and die together, and he who is the friend of the one, cannot consistently be the enemy of the other. If liberty, as is admitted on all hands, is the perfection of civil society, by what right can religious society become despoiled of this crowning excellence of the social

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state? The New Testament furnishes the principles but not the forms of church government; and in the adaptation of forms to these principles, christian bodies should be governed mainly by the few facts and precedents furnished in the apostolic writings. The will and mind of the Great Head of the church, on this subject, so far as clearly revealed, whether by express statute or fair implication, cannot be contravened without impiety; but in relation to a variety of topics, connected with the internal police, and external relations of the church, on which the scriptures are silent, it is left to every christian community to adopt its own regulations, and the same is true of nations. Ministers and private christians, according to the New Testament, are entitled to equal rights and privileges — an identity of interests implies an equality of rights. A monopoly of power, therefore, by the ministry, is an usurpation of the rights of the people. No power on the part of the ministry, can deprive the people legitimately of their elective and representative rights; as the ministry cannot think and act for the people, in matters of principle and conviction, so neither can they legislate for them, except as their authorized representatives."

This logic would be conclusive as well as eloquent, but for one consideration: it is based upon false assumptions. The members of the Methodist Episcopal Church certainly have no other conventional rights

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than those recognized in our constitution. And inasmuch as the laws of the church are furnished by the Lord Jesus Christ, there is, properly speaking, as we have shown, no *legislation* to be done. The enactments which bind the church are moral, and their observance is a matter of imperative duty. By enactments, here, we mean the law as made known in the New Testament. Of course we admit these include only *general* features or principles. The *details* are left to be carried out as circumstances may suggest.

And in view of the fact that our economy is made known to the world, without disguise or reservation, those who are associated with us, were familiar with its provisions before they became members of our church. And, consequently, we must insist that we invade no man's rights when we confine ourselves thereto.

But it should be kept in mind, that we have no ministers, save those who have been *chosen by the people.* The responsibilities and powers of the ministerial office, as set forth in our system, may be read and known of all men. And hence, when the people recommended those who now serve them in this capacity, they did it understandingly. And in their recommendation, they chose, appointed, or elevated them to all these immunities. If they recommended unworthy persons, that is their fault or misfortune, and no defect in our institutions should be inferred. So that, after all, in a certain and very proper sense, our ministers are the

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representatives of the people. Consequently, we cannot admit that they may be considered a "monopoly of power;" nor can they be charged with having usurped the rights of the people.

In relation to the choice of ministers, our people, in some respects, do not exercise the privileges possessed by those of other churches. As previously stated, in exchange for the numerous and marked advantages of the *itinerancy*, they have yielded their right in this respect. Still, it must not be understood that the laity have nothing to do in making a selection of their ministers. They are permitted by petition or otherwise, to make known their wishes and views, which, so far as circumstances will permit, are always regarded by the stationing authority. Committees of laymen confer freely with the presiding elders and the bishops; and most generally have their wishes gratified. It may occasionally happen that they will be disappointed and aggrieved. But in most cases, they are satisfied and pleased. And in no denomination is there a better understanding between the laity and the clergy, than among us. We may safely say, no people on earth give their pastors a more cheerful and ready support, than the members of our church, in all ordinary circumstances. There may be occasional exceptions. We use the term *support*, not in its ordinary acceptation, but in the sense of fraternal confidence and co-operation. Our people and their pastors, with but few

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exceptions, labor together in the vineyard of the Lord with great harmony and success.

It is complained sometimes, that there is no freedom of speech tolerated among us. It is said, if the people presume to say anything in the way of an independent expression of opinion, touching any of our peculiar usages, etc., they are immediately arrested and dealt with according to the discipline. But there never was a more ungenerous misrepresentation. It is true, neither the ministry or membership may *sow dissensions* among us, by inveighing against our doctrine and discipline. But from a free and open declaration of sentiment, upon any of our doctrines, or any part of our discipline, no one is prohibited. The members of the Methodist Episcopal Church are as independent in these particulars, as the laity of any other church in the world. Of course, we do not tolerate *heresy*. And hence, if any one hold and seek to disseminate *doctrinal errors*, in the true sense of the phrase, he is properly adjudged to deserve rebuke; and if he persist, he should be excluded. And this is not peculiar to Methodism. It is practiced everywhere else.

Finally, we may say of the laity, they are brought into such proximity to their pastors, and are so closely united with them in promoting the interests of religion, that they may indeed be called brethren and "*fellow laborers.*" Our usages are such as open large and inviting fields of labor and usefulness, to all who

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desire to be actively engaged in doing good. Vigilant and untiring activity and zeal, seem as it were, almost the natural and uniform developments and results of our peculiar system. Hence the glorious fruits of our toil. One, upon inquiring into the cause of the marvelous success of the Methodist churches, said he found it fully explained in the fact that they were *all* at work, and *always* working. This, as before stated, is the effect of our system or method of operation, by which every conceivable agency and means of success and progress are employed, well directed, and brought to a practical issue, which affords abundant occasion of joy, to both earth and heaven.

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CHAPTER XIII.

METHODISM AGGRESSIVE.

Methodism assailed with violent opposition—Pressed onward, etc.

METHODISM is an *aggressive* system. From the beginning, it has met with the most violent opposition. No measures to prevent its advance, were deemed too vigorous or ultra. Men of note in the church and state, arrayed themselves, to contend against that which was deemed a common enemy. The priest and the magistrate; the whinings of Pharisaic Puritanism, and the clamor of profane mobs; the pulpit and the press; and the altar and throne, all combined to oppose the schemes and success of this new sect. On the one hand, we were represented as a band of enthusiastic fanatics; on the other, it was alleged, we sought to subvert the order and harmony of society. The pulpit trembled under the anathemas uttered against us by gowned and mitered priests, and bishops; and the press was burdened with abusive and incendiary denunciations of all we were, and all we had done. The most discordant elements and conflicting interests seemed to unite, and the Protestant and Catholic appeared anxious to excel in malevolent and unprincipled hostility

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toward an institution, the nature and design of which, they did not, or would not understand.

The ministers of our church were everywhere treated with contempt, or viewed with distrust. Our doctrines were so distorted by those who pretended to examine or controvert them, as to be esteemed the most flagrant heresy. Our usages were misrepresented, and became the occasion of many a "fool-born jest," and repeated expressions of holy horror and disgust. Some mocked, others wept over our folly. And those who had no disposition to weep, and were not content with mocking, persecuted us. Hence, it was frequently at the peril of a man's character and life, to become in any way associated with us. Many were imprisoned, and cast off by all their earthly friends. And any who might desire to be the disciples of Christ, and teach the doctrines and precepts of religion after this way, must forsake "father and mother, and houses and lands." He, who would *save* his life, must then be ready and willing to *lose* it.

Notwithstanding all these things, Methodism was not only secure, but also invincible. Pressing onward she "pushed the battle to the gate," and inspired all her votaries with the zeal of evangelists, and the firmness and courage of martyrs. The fearful odds against which they contended, who were engaged in propagating our faith in the early period of our history, are almost incredible. Held by the church as irregular

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and unauthorized teachers, and esteemed by the world, deluded zealots, these men moved onward, and advanced as a victorious and skillfully directed army, guarding and amply securing every city, town, village, or neighborhood, that came under their influence. And such has been the course of Methodism everywhere. Our *pioneer* or initiatory operations, are followed by some more permanent plan; and soon, through God's blessing, we find ourselves in possession of many of the most important points of the country in which Providence may direct us to rear the banner of the cross. In the first place, a few persons go into a neighborhood, or a small town or village, and commence a prayer-meeting; soon a Sabbath school is instituted; the preachers are then invited to make a regular appointment; a society is formed; a church is built, and with the growth and progress of the place, a large and flourishing congregation is established. This, in brief, is the history of the early movements, of a large number of our churches, especially in the western country.

And this, in a measure, may be considered a necessary result of our system. It is itself a vital, energetic, vigilant, active, and untiring method of religious and moral enterprise. Under its influence, our people are easy and happy, only so long as they behold Zion extending her borders, and are instrumental in adding to the triumphs of the gospel. Nor can they rest,

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until the kingdom of God shall reach "from sea to sea; and from the river to the ends of the earth." Immediately, almost, when we have completed one conquest, and made proper arrangements to secure and improve the advantages we may have gained, we advance to some other position of the enemy, and seek another battle and accomplish another victory. And still we move on, fighting and conquering; each successful contest only making us the more enthusiastic again to meet the foe. The moment we cease thus to move, and labor, and toil, and conquer, we will lose the spirit, and make void the true intent of Methodism.

One of our own authors, in referring to these points, makes the following appropriate remarks: "Wesley and his coadjutors preached the common doctrines of the gospel, but distinguished them more clearly, and emphasized them more strongly, than others; insomuch, that they struck the public ear as new truths. They were not content with the limits of church edifices, but betook themselves to the open air. Stationary labors would not satisfy their zeal; but they went up and down the land, preaching by night and by day; they 'ran to and fro, and knowledge increased.' Methodism could not delay its great designs by waiting for a ministry qualified by the old course of preparatory education, but revived the apostolic example of a *lay ministry*. Not content with its itinerant laborers, it called into use its less available energies, by establishing

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the new departments of local preachers, exhorters, and leaders. While it retained the more formal means of grace, it either introduced or adopted the class-meeting, the band-meeting, the prayer-meeting, the camp-meeting, the lovefeast, and the watch-night. Thus it studied to apply every energy, and to apply it in the most productive manner. The effective system of American Methodism, exemplifies well this its practical energy. It is a vast and powerful machinery.

Methodism is essentially vital and operative: it must ever be so: it is an *absolute necessity* of its system. And herein we observe a peculiarity which ought to strike most impressively its friends, as guaranteeing, with the divine blessing, its perpetual integrity and prevalence. All other sectarian forms of christianity have declined. Congregationalism, with its simple rites, became a lifeless system of religious commonplaces. Protestant Episcopalianism degenerated into a spiritless ritual. All the distinctive and essential traits of each, have co-existed with a general absence of vital religion. The state of the English Church when Methodism began, was an example of the latter; the state of the New England Church before Edwards, of the former. But we can hardly conceive of Methodism in such a state. While those sects have loss their vitality, without losing any of their distinctive traits, *Methodism* absolutely cannot thus decline, without the extinction of all that is Methodistic in its system.

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It seems in this view a final form of christianity — a millenial system. How can we conceive of a lifeless laity embodied in classes, and meeting weekly to converse of christian experience? Or of a dead ministry leading the pilgrim life of itinerants? Or of such a laity hearing, and such a ministry preaching, the distinctive doctrines of Methodism—*distinguishable conversion*, the witness of the Spirit, and christian perfection? Herein, then, is Methodism unique: it cannot, like other sects, decline seriously, and retain its distinctive character. It can only fall by a *revolution* of its whole practical system; it must lose its identity, and be no longer Methodism. We do not assert its infallibility, but its singular security. It may experience such a revolution; but the impediments and the improbabilities are extraordinary."

The truth of the foregoing observations will find abundant proof in our past history, and the present condition and prospects of Methodism throughout the world. Notwithstanding a tedious and violent struggle with the various foes who have opposed our progress, we retain the peculiar earnestness, untiring vigilance, and resistless activity that marked the character of our "fathers." Hence, the republic, known by the title of the Lone Star, had scarcely proclaimed its independence, ere a detachment of our itinerant hosts might be seen sweeping across its broad savannas, and pressing through its almost impassable swamps; pausing

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here and there to preach the "unsearchable riches of Christ" to as vicious and degraded a body of men, as the world ever saw. There they also established a college and numerous schools and seminaries of learning. In this manner they provided means for both the moral and intellectual improvement of the public mind and heart. Our conquests in Mexico were but just made secure, when numbers of our ministry, inflamed with an ardor that would have made them successful in any enterprise, offered themselves to the authorities of the church, and seemed anxious to carry the standard of the cross to California, Santa Fe, etc. In more settled communities, this is as a "pent up flame," and when it breaks forth, it only burns the more intensely for having been confined. And still we advance. New fields invite our attention. The cry of Ethiopia, the solicitations for help that come from the far-famed East, the wants and importunities of the Red man of the distant West, the necessities of our own country, and the interest which gathers around the pathway of the aroused millions of the Old World, combine to excite our enthusiasm; and present a glorious opportunity for our system, to develope its energies, and accomplish the most wonderful results ever known in the progress of the "gospel of the grace of God."

The following observations contain many useful and important suggestions. "Let it be the universal idea of the church that we may lead on the aggressive

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movements of christianity, and our zeal will be redoubled. Heretofore we have been surprised at our own success, without a definite inference of its future results. We have exclaimed, 'What hath God wrought!' and wondered whereunto it would tend. Standing now far in front of the religious bodies of this great nation, and prominent in the van of those of Europe, we ought to project plans for the future; and they should be sublime ones, befitting the gospel, and comprehensive as our lost world. Our zeal should look forward to the time when Methodist itinerants shall traverse the wilds of Africa and the deserts of Tartary, and shout for joy along the Andes and the Himalaya. But this is enthusiasm—yes, it is; yet it does not transcend the power or the promise of God. It is the enthusiasm that inflamed the prophets, and bled on the cross for our redemption; and it must yet thrill through the church before it will put on its full energy. Heretofore it has moved by occasional impulses. Ever and anon a glory, as of the latter day, has dawned upon it, but been followed by darkness; but now good men are looking at the signs of the moral heavens with new eagerness and hope. In all lands great and effectual doors are opening. New means of spiritual warfare are constantly arising. A special providence seems to control the course of civil events. The political arm of antichrist at least is broken, and the crescent of the false prophet but gleams on the

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horizon. The idea is becoming general in the church that the morning of the latter day is approaching—that the final battle is at hand. In these circumstances, how stands Methodism—one of the largest corps of the evangelical host, disciplined and hardy by a century of conflicts, possessing energies unequalled by any other sect, and lacking only a more definite conception of its true capability to enable it to send trembling among the powers of darkness? We have a better idea of the nature of our mission than of its extent. We work well at the posts which have fallen to us, but show a culpable hesitancy in assuming our true position. Denominations of much less strength are before us in their efforts for education, missions, etc., and their influence on the public mind. Being first in numerical strength, it devolves upon us to be first in all christian efforts; but we are not yet second. Our missionary contributions are an example: our present income would be about quadrupled by each member paying only a cent a week. Let the idea of our special mission be generally received, and it will arouse us from this apathy; and, when once awakened, we shall find our resources a hundred-fold greater than we have apprehended them to be. O that the young generation of Methodists, to whom is committed the future, may understand their 'high calling,' and 'acquit themselves like men!' Let them be admonished that theirs will be a position of rare responsibility, and, if faithfully sustained, as glorious in honor and reward."

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CHAPTER XIV.

METHODISM PROGRESSIVE.

Essentials unchanged—Incidental features improved.

METHODISM is a *progressive* system. It is not composed of an array of unchangeable forms and ceremonies; but of prudential regulations, employed as time and circumstances may render necessary. The incipient measures of the Holy Club, at Oxford, resulted in the comprehensive and efficient organization of the societies. This afterward gave place to what is now known as the *Wesleyan Methodist Church* in England, and the *Methodist Episcopal Church* in America. And at each successive step, those improvements and modifications have been made, which promised to contribute to the general good.

The *doctrines* of the system, and such fundamental features as *itinerancy* and *class-meetings*, have always been considered truths and measures suited to all times and places; and hence, have been essentially the same among us, ever since they were taught and instituted. In other respects, our economy has been progressive. And this is of necessity. No particular method, or

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incidental arrangement to teach our doctrine, or execute the measures we have named, could be made to suit every age and place. We have seen that the *itinerancy* is sustained by scripture precept and example. Therefore, it is a measure which, in its essential features, is suitable everywhere and through all time. And the institution of *class-meetings*, in view of the itinerancy, is indispensable. Hence, although in the *form* in which these measures exist among us, they may be esteemed of human origin, the principles — the original elements of their institution, most certainly were revealed and taught in God's holy word. Hence, they may not be changed, save in their incidental developments and operations.

Our doctrines are from Heaven. And the method of promulgating them by an *itinerant* instrumentality, is in accordance with the great commission: "*Go ye into all the world*, and preach the gospel to every creature." It is also in harmony with the example of the apostles, and the usages of the primitive church. In obedience to the spirit and obvious intent of the instructions given by our Lord to his disciples, and their example, we require our ministers to devote themselves entirely to the work of God, and permit them to have no home or resting-place for the soles of their feet. To aid them in their noble enterprise, we provide for the moral culture and improvement of those they persuade to come to Christ, in our meetings for religious communion

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and fellowship. In this way, we secure concerted action, and unity of design in all our movements.

Still, our system, in regard to *non-essential* features, is susceptible of improvement; and additions have been made thereto from time to time, without detriment to anything at all essential. And hence, as circumstances have indicated it to be proper, we have changed and improved it: so that at each successive period, it has been wisely adapted to meet the general state of society, and any particular emergency that may have existed in the church or the world.

It is ample occasion of surprise and astonishment, that so many of our brethren seem to forget, or lose sight of the true character of Methodism, and the real spirit of our age. We live in the midst of the most eventful revolutions and rapid advance the world has ever known. And our system, unless encumbered with superstitious deference to *obsolete* customs, is eminently adapted to the emergency which is upon us. Literature, art, morality, and religion, seem to have aroused all their energies, to improve the social state, and redeem our race from ignorance, oppression, and sin. Never before could it be more truthfully said, that our field is "*the world.*"

The following expressive language is to the point: "*Progress* is written, in glaring capitals, on the brow of the present age. The very earth shakes with the tread of the giant *Enterprise*. Ocean, earth, and air,

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constantly resound with the mighty and multitudinous results of science and art. Christianity is the mighty spring that has started these innumerable and wonderful agencies, and keeps them all in motion. Shall she fail in carrying on her legitimate line of operations, or in keeping up the spirit she has so bountifully infused into all the departments of life? We pray not. If not in advance, at least in the wake, of all the enterprises her genius has begotten and fostered, we trust she will be found bearing the messages of mercy and salvation to all lands. Through that net-work of nerves, which soon shall bring all parts of the world into immediate intellectual connection, may she pour the streams of living truth; and on those paths of iron, running in all directions, crossing and recrossing each other, binding all together as mighty muscles; may nations be brought into closer contact, and the whole family of man, partaking of the spirit of christianity, become one common brotherhood.

In this great work of evangelical fraternization, Methodism has an important part to perform ere her mission is accomplished. May she prove true to her trust, and, having finished the work assigned her as a child of Providence, raised up for a specific purpose, may she mingle at last with that mighty multitude, which no man can number, where all distinctions are forgotten, and names are unknown."

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CHAPTER XV.

RESULTS AND PROSPECTS.

Number of members—Missionary statistics—Sabbath schools—Literary resources—Book Concern—Conclusion.

In conclusion, let us contemplate the results and the prospects of Methodism. This will tend to inspire us with the most sincere and devout gratitude, wonder and joy. The eye of the christian never rested upon a view so sublime and animating, as that which is presented in the glorious *results*, and still *more* glorious *prospects* of Methodism.

A little over one century ago, a small company of zealous and upright men, moved by the Holy Ghost, and directed by a leader of undoubted piety and skill, moved "to and fro" through the British Empire, and preached with simplicity and power "the gospel of the grace of God." Their attention soon was directed to other countries; and, as Providence directed them, they went out into the "highways and hedges," and urged their fellow-men to attend the "marriage feast." Their immediate success, although in many respects extraordinary, seemed for a time, to excite only pity or scorn,

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as men deplored or despised them. At length, however, they had accomplished enough to attract considerable notice from the pulpit and the press. As their success became more marked and extensive, the opposition against them, was more violent and notorious. Stil they pressed onward; and regardless of all the difficulties that beset them on every side, continued to preach, and pray, and labor, and, as they had opportunity, to "do good unto all men."

Wherever they went "signs and wonders followed them." The approbation of Heaven was upon them in all their journeyings; and their ministrations were attended with the demonstration and power of the Holy Ghost. But one after another, they fell at their post; and the last of that faithful band, was ultimately gathered, with those who had gone before, to the repose of the tomb. The system which they established, however, did not die; it remained in all its strength and glory. Their successors proved themselves, in every way worthy the trust confided to them. The same zeal and faith that marked the labors of their fathers in the gospel, were displayed by them. Inspired with the idea, that they were commissioned from above, to spread abroad over the earth the knowledge of God, they proceeded to fulfill their mission and accomplish their work. The fruit of their labors may be seen in both hemispheres, on every continent, and upon almost every island of the sea. The sun never sets upon

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the territory, over which their influence has been extended. And earth and heaven contain a myriad host of witnesses of the truth and power of their doctrine, and the wonderful results of their toil.

That we have not spoken in terms of commendation too strong, or bestowed unmerited praise, will appear, if we take into the account a few well-authenticated facts. From various reliable sources, we learn, the followers of John Wesley, now number about *ten thousand* itinerant, and *thirty thousand* local preachers, *two million* members, *two hundred thousand* Sabbath school teachers, and *one million* of children under their tuition. Who can estimate the amount of good accomplished in the salvation of all these? Beside these, we may reckon a still greater number, who have reached the home of the saints, and with the sacramental host of God's elect, have seen the King in his beauty, and are now singing the song of Moses and the Lamb.

This immense aggregate of good, is still increased by contemplating the moral and social degradation from which Methodism elevated a large proportion of this great multitude. Our economy has not generally been popular with the proud and rich of the world, or the noted and honorable of the church. The poor and the destitute, the abandoned and degraded, have preferred it. Our views of the unmeasured sufficiency of the atonement, and the utter unworthiness and helplessness of man, have invited thousands into the fold

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of Christ, who otherwise never would have dreamed of reformation. Imbued with the true spirit and genius of christianity, Methodist preachers have urged and called to the feast prepared for our race, the lame, and the halt, and the blind. They have opened the kingdom of God to publicans and sinners; and as wondering thousands have listened with intense interest and amazement, they have exultingly declared, "He is able to save to the *uttermost* all that will come unto God through Him." They verily were not sent to call the righteous, but *sinners* to repentance. Hence, although blessed with talents and zeal, which would have gained them eminence and fame in any department of human life, they have, with unmeasured confidence in the renovating power of the superabounding grace of God, visited the abodes of crime and misery, and there dispensed the saving knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. They have always governed their action by a truth that was uttered by Christ himself—"They that be *whole*, need not a physician, but they that are *sick*."

We are aware that sometimes this circumstance is presented to the disparagement of Methodism. But certainly there is no point connected with its history, at which its beauty and strength are so vividly displayed. It is a work of some consequence, to convince and save a self-important Pharisee, or a man of wealth and distinction. But it is a work of greater difficulty,

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in some respects, and hence, of greater *praise*, to rescue and reform the profane and the degraded. And that our system has been signally owned of God, in this particular, no one of the least candor or intelligence, will pretend to deny. Nor should we on any account make this, our boasting, vain. To preach to the poor; to go to the haunts of human wretchedness and degradation; and by all possible means to save all we can, should be our constant aim. With such a noble and God-like purpose in view, our path will be as that of the just, "shining more and more unto the perfect day."

The missionary resources of Methodism are worthy of notice in this connection. Dr. Bangs, in a late work setting forth the prospects and responsibilities of Methodism, speaking of the marks of improvement among us, says: "Another evidence of the improvement which this church has made, within twenty or thirty years past, is to be found in her missionary department. I do not mean by this that she lacked the missionary spirit in former days, for indeed her ministry was always a missionary ministry, always aggressive in its operations, making, by its energetic labors, inroads upon the territories of Satan. Among modern missionaries, none equalled John Wesley, either in the amount, extent, or success, of his ministerial labors. His sons in the gospel imbibed his spirit, and imitated his example, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, to the utmost extent of their abilities, to 'every nation and kindred

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on the earth.' It was this spirit that brought them to this country, and the fire which they kindled up here burned so intensely in the hearts of those missionaries and their successors, that it impelled them on in their work, until they stretched themselves over the extended settlements of this continent, visiting almost every city, village, and settlement, even to the remotest log hut in the wilderness. But still there were many intervening places to be filled up, many new settlements to be supplied, many an Indian tribe to be evangelized, and many a heathen nation to be converted to christianity.

Over these desolations the more pious and enlightened portions of the church cast a pitying eye, and sent up a prayer to God for their salvation. On looking back upon the history of our church, and seeing what she had done; on looking forward and around, and seeing what was yet to be done, and considering at the same time her capabilities, both temporally and spiritually, of doing much more than she had done for the salvation of the world; excited to action by a few benevolent spirits, she determined to put forth her energies to 'extend her missionary labors throughout the United States and elsewhere.' This gave rise to the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Considering the state of piety in the church at that time, one would be surprised at the objections which were made, even by men of unquestionable goodness, against the formation of this society—some impugning

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the motives of its originators, others ranking it among visionary schemes, and not a few lamenting over it, as calculated to weaken, if not indeed to sap the foundations of the itinerancy. The friends of the measure, however, were so conscious of the purity of their motives, and the rectitude of their conduct, that they persevered in their work, not stopping to answer objections, looking to God for aid and direction, fully believing that He would sanction, and of course prosper, their undertaking.

The event has justified their anticipations. Never has a cause been more blessed than the missionary cause. Its commencement, to be sure, was feeble. Though it was recognized by the General Conference, which convened a year after its formation, namely, in 1820, yet the amount collected the first year was only $823 04, and the amount expended $85 76. The next year there was reported as having been received $2,328 76, and expended $407 87. It seemed more difficult to expend than to collect the money, although the collections were sufficiently small; so difficult indeed was it to diffuse the missionary spirit among the preachers and people, that our bishops were fearful of selecting and appointing missionaries, lest they should seem to trespass upon the funds of the Church. This apathy, however, did not originate from any want of zeal in the cause of God, nor from any lack of piety in the heads, or in the church generally, but chiefly from too

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scrupulous a regard for the other interests of the church, and a fear of appropriating money unconstitutionally. To remove these scruples, and to obviate these objections, I remember perfectly well that the Board of Managers appointed a committee to correspond with the bishops, the object of which was to induce them to appoint missionaries, and to draw the funds for their support.

But the cause gradually advanced—so slowly, however, that from 1819 to 1832, there was a balance reported in the treasury each year, notwithstanding the greatest amount received for any one year was only $14,176 11. In 1832 the Liberia Mission was commenced, and from that time a new spring seemed to be given to the missionary cause, for the funds have gradually increased, and the fields of labor have enlarged, until in 1839, when the available funds amounted to $139,521 94; and in 1840 there were expended $146,498 58, which I believe were the largest amounts ever received and expended in any one year.

Though after this there was a falling off, for a short time, it may be accounted for without supposing any dereliction of evangelical piety and zeal in the church, as is manifest from the fact that latterly the spirit of liberality has expanded; so much so, that the amount received in 1848, including the North and South, was $144,223 66, which is $4,701 62 more than had been received for any previous year; which, though not in proportion to the increase of numbers and wealth,

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shows that the missionary spirit is rising among us. This, together with the enlargement of the missionary field, particularly in China and California, is an encouraging omen, and should serve as a memento of the goodness of God.

Now let us see what this society has done, not merely in raising money, and supporting men, but awakening and converting sinners. I presume to say, that in this latter work they have far outstripped every other missionary society in existence. Let any one read its history, follow its missionaries, and look at the evidences — most manifest and palpable evidences — of the conversion of souls, among the aborigines of our country, the slave population of the South, in the new states and territories of the West, and among the Germans, as well as in Liberia and South America — though in this last place I grant but little comparatively has been done — and he will be convinced that God has given his sanction to this society in a most eminent degree. During the thirty-one years of its existence, notwithstanding its feebleness for about thirteen years of its infancy — though during that period, its friends marked with pleasure its gradual growth, and perceived signs of health and vigor which promised the future strength of its manhood — I presume that it has been instrumental of bringing upwards of 60,000 souls into the bosom of the church, directly, besides its benign influence in its indirect action in stirring up the spirit

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of prayer, in diffusing the spirit of liberality, and laying a foundation for the future growth and prosperity of the cause of God in places where it first planted the gospel, and has since left them to be provided for in the more regular way; for it has always been the policy of this society, as soon as any place became able to support itself, to withdraw its pecuniary aid, and confine itself to more new and destitute places."

The receipts of the missionary society of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the past year, were nearly *one hundred and ten thousand dollars*. The Board of Managers passed a resolution to appropriate *one hundred and fifty thousand dollars* for the support of our missions the coming year. This society employs missionaries in Europe, Asia, Africa, and America. At the time of the last annual report, we had *three* in China, *fourteen* in Africa, *one* in South America, *nine* in Oregon, *two* in California, *three* in Germany, *one hundred and eight* among the German population of our own country, *seventeen* among the Indians, *two* among the Swedes and Norwegians, and *three hundred and thirty-seven* in destitute portions of the regular work. Since the annual report was published, there have been several important accessions to our missionary corps. The number of members among the German population, and in our foreign missions, is about *ten thousand;* in our domestic missions, *thirty-one thousand;* in all, forty-one thousand.

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The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, collected for missionary purposes the past year, nearly *eighty-six thousand dollars*. They employ among the people of color, *one hundred and four* missionaries. For the benefit of the Indians, *thirty-nine*, and among the Germans *eight*. In China, they have *two;* in California, *three;* and in destitute portions of the regular work, *one hundred and seventeen*. The number of church members connected with these missions, is about *sixty thousand*.

The Wesleyan Missionary Society is perhaps the most efficient missionary organization of the Protestant Church. It occupies fields of labor in all the four quarters of the globe. There are under its charge *three hundred and twenty-four* circuits, or principal stations. It employs *four hundred and twenty-seven* missionaries and assistant missionaries, who supply near *three thousand* chapels and other preaching places. There are also *eight hundred* other paid agents, embracing catechists, interpreters, day-school teachers, etc. Beside these, there are over *eight thousand* unpaid agents, including local preachers and Sunday school teachers. The number of members, including probationers, is about *one hundred and ten thousand*. There are nearly *eighty thousand* scholars attending the various day and Sunday schools. The society also employs *eight* printing establishments on the foreign stations. The returns of members from the foreign missions for

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the last year, exhibit an increase of over five thousand. The annual income amounts to *five hundred and fifty thousand dollars.*

Taking the foregoing statistics, as the basis of a calculation for the missionary operations of the balance of the Methodist churches of Great Britain and our own country, it will be seen, that the entire Wesleyan family, have expended within the last year, in this benevolent enterprise, not much short of *one million dollars.* They have in the field *fifteen hundred* missionaries, who are charged with the pastoral oversight of some *one hundred and fifty thousand* Sunday school scholars, and *three hundred thousand* church members. What a great amount of moral and religious influence must be exerted through this extended agency! Who can anticipate the vast results its progress will develope!

The Sabbath school operations of Methodism, should also be taken into the account. The statistics of the Methodist Episcopal Church, warrant the assertion, that the followers of John Wesley have *two hundred thousand teachers* employed in training *one million* children to walk in the "good and right way." Beside our Sabbath school agencies for the instruction and salvation of children and youth, there are our *literary institutions,* most of which are in a highly prosperous condition.

In no respect has Methodism made more encouraging advance than in relation to *literature.* The following

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observations by Dr. Bangs, occur in a work already mentioned. They deserve attention as the views of one long known and esteemed among us for his wisdom and experience. "Another evidence of the improvement of the church is, the revival and diffusion of the spirit and practice of education. We know that it was a favorite object of Mr. Wesley to provide for the education of the youth, not only in piety, but also in literature and science. Hence, the early establishment of the Kingswood school; and his followers have added another since his death, and have likewise established two theological schools, for the training and education of such young men in the local ministry as are on the reserve-list, in scientific and theological knowledge, that they may thereby become better qualified to instruct others.

At the organization of our church in this country, in 1784, Dr. Coke and Bishop Asbury submitted a plan to the conference for the establishment of a college. Of this the conference approved, and it was speedily carried into execution; the college buildings were erected, and the school went into operation under favorable circumstances, and continued to prosper for about ten years, when the whole was consumed by fire. A second one soon after shared the same fate. These disastrous occurrences discouraged the friends of education, and prevented any efforts from being put forth in this cause, except some ineffectual ones in favor of district

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schools, for upwards of twenty years; and, indeed, such was the apathy manifested on this subject, that Methodist preachers were accused, not without some show of reason, of being enemies of literature and science. Though this was not true in its application to all concerned, yet it must be confessed that there was too much ground for the taunt against the great body, if we may judge of the disposition of the heart by the actions of the life.

But, whatever may be conceded to this mortifying objection, for upwards of twenty years past the church has evinced a disposition to redeem herself from the reproach, by exerting her energies to establish academies and colleges in different parts of her jurisdiction. The first successful effort in this cause was made in New England, in 1817, by the founding of the Newmarket Academy; the next, in the city of New York, in 1819, by the establishment of the Wesleyan Seminary. The first college which obtained a permanence was the Augusta College, located in the town of Augusta, state of Kentucky, in 1823. In 1831, the Wesleyan University was founded, and two others, namely, Randolph Macon and La Grange.

The commencement of these academies and colleges seemed to beget a general desire, throughout the bounds of the several annual conferences, to embark in the cause of education; and so widely has this desire been diffused, and so deeply has it descended into the heart

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of the church, that there have been established, and are now in successful operation, between thirty and forty academies, and fourteen collegiate institutions, including the North and South; besides a number of other academies, which are so far patronized by the conferences that they appoint boards of visitors, and recommend them to the patronage of our people. Here then is an improvement of vast importance to the character, permanence, and prosperity of the church.

I am aware that there are those among us who look upon these literary institutions with a jealous eye, while others treat them with cold indifference, and some few, perhaps, with hostility. But I am happy to believe that the great majority of the most influential, both among preachers and people, hail this improvement as ominous of good to the church. I have indeed regretted to see this subject—the subject of education—treated with a sarcastic sneer by an aged writer, as though it was the offspring of pride and vanity, indicative of a degenerate state of the church. It is believed, however, that such a sentiment has but few sympathizers, and that the prevailing spirit of the age, and the pious efforts of God's servants, will ultimately sweep away all these objections, and put to shame the cavilling caricatures of those who attempt to hold up to ridicule these nurseries of learning and religion.

That God has sanctioned them, is abundantly manifest from the powerful revivals of religion which have

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prevailed at different times among the students. I presume to say that God has visited them as often, and as powerfully, with the reviving influences of his Spirit, as he has any other places, even the churches which are under the stated ministry of the word and ordinances of the gospel. Hence, young men have been raised up, not only endowed with human learning, but also deeply imbued with the spirit of their divine Master, and have gone forth as flaming heralds of the gospel of the Son of God."

It is strange, but true, that formerly, there was a strong prejudice among us, against learning; and especially against learned ministers. It is very singular indeed, that those who professed veneration for the example and memory of such men as Wesley, Clarke, Benson, Watson, Coke, Asbury, etc., should ever have found it in their hearts, to undervalue the importance of literary attainments and qualifications. But it is a fact, humiliating as it may be, that such was the case. We have heard, that not more than twenty years ago, in one of the largest and most respectable congregations of our entire connexion, a prominent minister arose, and in a solemn and emphatic manner exclaimed, "*thank God I never saw a college!*" To this unworthy and unbecoming boast, there was a ready and warm response from a considerable part of the assembly present. But such a movement, at this day, would only make a man the most pitiable object of sympathy

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or scorn. In every part of the country we are establishing colleges and seminaries of learning, and throughout our entire field of operations, their blessed effects are felt and seen. The incipient organizations of Kingswood in England, and Cokesbury in America, have given place to the most efficient literary and theological institutions of either country. And from these colleges, seminaries, and academies, there have gone forth into the world, hundreds of able and successful ministers of Christ. From this source, chiefly, our missionary fields have been supplied with pious and zealous laborers. Hence, in regard to the fitness and utility of these institutions, there is a growing confidence among our friends, and increased jealousy among our foes.

We should also keep in mind, the means at our command for the dissemination of literary and theological publications, in the institution styled the Book Concern. A few allusions to this, by one who was well acquainted with its origin and early history, will be in point. "We commenced our Book Concern as early as 1789; its beginning was small, and its progress exceedingly slow. This, to be sure, might have been expected, from the infancy of the church, and the want of capital to set up with — of facilities for printing and circulating books. Yet these circumstances could not justify the apathy on this subject; for so little zeal was displayed in favor of printing and circulating books, that in the year 1813,

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there were only twenty-four different publications on sale at the Book Room; and one of these, Coke's Commentary, was imported from England. Leaving this out of the account, a copy of each work published might be purchased for $29 75; and among these were but three American publications, namely, Abbott's and Watters' Life, and the Scriptural Catechism. All the rest were reprints of books manufactured in England. And such was the lack of zeal in this cause, that though the General Conference, in 1812, in the midst of opposition from several delegates — for I distinctly remember all these things — ordered a resumption of the Magazine, and appointed committees to collect materials for a history of our church, yet nothing was done in either one case or the other. No magazine was published until two years after the next General Conference, in 1816, nor any materials collected for a history.

During the dark days I have been reviewing, we had scarcely a single writer on this side of the water, who dared to put his pen to paper. Excepting the Scriptural Catechism by the Rev. John Dickens — a most estimable man — Garrettson's, Abbott's, and Watters' Lives, and a few pieces which had appeared in the Arminian Magazine in 1780 and 1790, not an American publication appeared, unless now and then a straggling pamphlet, which hardly breathed the breath of life, and the most of which, as Hume said of one of his

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Essays, 'fell still-born from the press.' This was the general state of things for about thirty years, namely, from 1789 to 1818, when new life began to be infused into our press, and it has been gradually growing and improving from that day to this.

What is its present state? On looking over its catalogue of books, I find, if I have counted accurately, no less than 236 different publications, small and great, among which are Clarke's, Benson's, Wesley's, and Watson's Commentaries, Bibles and Testaments, and almost every species of literature, on theological, historical, and biographical subjects, as well as experimental and practical piety.

In addition to these, look at the list of tracts amounting to upwards of 360, of from 4 to 60 pages each, besides a Sunday school library, and books for Sunday school scholars. There are also published, including the North and South, two Quarterly Reviews, one monthly, seven weekly papers, a Sunday School Advocate, and a Missionary Advocate; and as to writers, there is no comparison between the present and former periods of the church."

It has frequently been understood, and erroneously, as we think, that our Book Concern is designed in the main, to provide the means of support for our supernumerary and superannuated preachers, and the families of deceased ministers. If such indeed were its design, it has been a sad failure. To talk of *supporting*,

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or even materially *relieving*, the class above named, by an annual dividend of from *three to six hundred dollars* to each annual conference, is perfectly absurd. For instance, in the Baltimore, New Jersey, New England, and Ohio Conferences, as we learn from the General Minutes, the amount necessary to meet the claims of living preachers, and the widows and orphans of those who have died in the work, was a fraction over *thirty-three thousand dollars*. For the purpose of paying this sum, the Book Concern furnished just *twenty-three hundred dollars* — or not quite seven cents to the dollar. Is this to be called *supporting* the preachers and their widows and orphans? Does it even deserve the name of *relief?* We repeat it then, that the idea of providing support or relief for the preachers and their families, by the Book Concern, is absurd. It is deceptive and injurious; and should have been exploded years ago.

Nevertheless, as the means of giving a healthy tone to the reading of the Methodist community, our Book Concern is of inconceivable importance. Our religious periodicals and reviews, our biographical, and theological publications, together with the real literary productions disseminated by the Concern, render it one of the most powerful instrumentalities for the propagation of our faith, that we can employ. That its usefulness and efficiency might be greatly increased, if the price of books were much lower, and some more efficient arrangement were adopted to increase their sale, and

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secure a more general circulation, there can be no doubt. And if its *business*, or *financial* departments, were controlled by others, than those, who, according to their own profession, have been called of God and moved by the Holy Ghost, to devote themselves *entirely* to the work of the ministry, doubtless the changes above suggested, would soon be made; and that, too, without the least detriment to the resources of the establishment. The reader would do well to examine a very able and lucid article upon this subject, by the Rev. W. P. Strickland, in his work on the "Genius and Mission of Methodism."

Methodism has advanced rapidly in many other respects. Her ministry have improved in zeal, talents, and usefulness. We will have no controversy with those who speak with half concealed satisfaction, in disparaging terms of the ministry of this day, and whose chief mission among us seems to be to *croak*, *groan*, *complain*, and make invidious comparisons between the past and the present. They should be permitted, without molestation, to entertain their own views. All we ask of them, or others, is, that they bear in remembrance, our Lord said, "by their *works* ye shall know them." And surely the Methodist church, at no period of her history, has had a more laborious and successful body of ministers in the field, than at the present day. Their efforts in promoting all the great moral enterprises of the age are almost incredible.

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The improvement of architectural taste, in the erection of our religious edifices, etc., is also highly propitious, and presents an encouraging indication of healthy and vigorous progress.

Our success in the foregoing particulars, and many others that might be named, if not miraculous, is very remarkable. It can be accounted for only by admitting it to have beeen the work of the great and mighty God of Jacob. Our trust is in the Lord, the Holy One of Israel. Hence we have always attached great importance to the idea of a *divine call to the ministry*. Those who have been promoted to this responsible office, have taught doctrines, which necessarily inspired their own hearts with love and zeal. And in their communications with tne people, they have imparted to them their spirit. Thus the whole body has become an immense magazine of moral power, the contents of which will yet shake the world, and overthrow the strongholds of sin.

God in his goodness and mercy has called us to the most glorious mission ever accomplished on earth. The work before us should inspire the loftiest enthusiasm, and wake up all the energies of the soul. The immense results already secured, warrant the expectation, if we remain faithful, that we shall have a large share in the glory of the day when the "heathen shall be given to the Son of God for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession." The political convulsions of Europe, the effects of commerce upon

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the East, and the events which have recently marked the career of our own country, all unite to assure us the period is at hand, when all nations will acknowledge the supremacy of the King in Zion, and bow to his all-conquering Name.

To hasten that auspicious day, should be our constant hope and aim. That we may properly use all the influence at our command, and for which we must give account to the Judge of quick and dead; that our vast and increasing resources and energies may be employed in promoting the glory of God and the salvation of the world, it will be necessary for us to watch with the greatest jealousy, and resist to the utmost and to the last, any attempt to make Methodism a *mere system of forms and ceremonies*. Nothing would more certainly corrupt and enfeeble us. The *incidental* measures of christianity, however important and efficient, if viewed and applied so as to supplant the fundamental principles of faith and duty which it contains, corrupt the simplicity of the truth, and become a fruitful source of error and degeneracy. But if we should be thus deluded, in reference to a system composed chiefly of *prudential* regulations, in the judgment of discriminating and intelligent minds, we would become the most melancholy objects of commiseration and contempt.

Yet we are persuaded, in the goodness of God, and by the guidance of the Holy Comforter, we shall shun

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a rock on which so many interests have been wrecked. The mantle of the "fathers" has fallen upon their sons. And animated by the spirit that inflamed the hearts of Wesley, Whitefield, Fletcher, Clarke, Watson, Asbury, Coke, George, Roberts, Emory, Fisk, and a host of others, now numbered among the illustrious dead, it is impossible to conceive the wonderful destiny before us. *Ten thousand* traveling ministers, *thirty thousand* local preachers, *fifty thousand* class-leaders and exhorters, *two hundred thousand* Sabbath school teachers, and *two millions* of church members, all under the direction of the most perfect, and best arranged system of moral effort ever known upon earth, encourage the hope that the time predicted of old, and looked to with thrilling interest by prophets, patriarchs, apostles, martyrs, and all the saints, is at hand and soon will be fulfilled. The prospect is so full of promise, so pregnant with hope and certainty, that this vast and enthusiastic army, as they rush to the conflict, may be heard afar off, shouting, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon! Hallelujah! the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.

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